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The Dream Catcher

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MTNNAP001

A minor dissertation submitted in *partial fulfilment* of the requirements for the award of the degree of Masters in Creative Writing.

Faculty of the Humanities

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation, in this dissertation from the work or works of other people, has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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16th September 2008

Abstract

**(Master's Dissertation
(Creative Writing): 'The Dream Catcher')**

The novel/dissertation is about an ambitious, rural young woman who aspires to be a great performing artist. Rabeka Maru-a-pula, spurns a marriage proposal, from an eligible bachelor attending her church, because she feels that marriage will be an impediment to her unrealised dreams. Her parents are very upset by her decision.

She meets her former teacher, TM who, appreciative of her amateur acting experience, invites her to join his project, 'Realise Your Dream.' This step initiates a lasting friendship from which she will draw support and encouragement when she encounters trials in the future.

Owing to pressure from her parents who insist she must look for a 'secure' job, Rabeka is compelled to discontinue volunteering for TM's project. She goes to stay with her aunt in the city (Pretoria) where she is expected to find a job. But Rabeka decides to expend her energy trawling theatre companies, which she hopes will help her to edge closer to her dream.

When this committed Christian and virgin joins a professional theatre company, she resolves to resist peer pressure in the industry known for moral laxity and often carefree lifestyles. She turns into a butt of ridicule and sarcasm, as soon as her chastity becomes public knowledge.

In her determined journey towards the Promised Land, she foils attempts of three sexual predators.

When she demonstrates that she can make a living from theatre, her parents are still sceptical, insisting she should get a 'reliable' job which has benefits such as a housing subsidy, medical aid, etc. But one of her relatives, aunt Mpule, supports her to the hilt.

The third and last man trying to seduce her, resorts to a date rape drug, but fails. The tour is cancelled, and Rabeka finds time and space to recover and to plan her future. Rabeka and Dudu, a fellow actress and an older woman who has become her confidante start a project serving young women who are casualties of date rape drugs.

Rabeka's path of love dogged by uncertainty ends triumphantly when she reunites with her beau who had 'mysteriously vanished.'

As the heroine has not achieved her goals, the novel will have a sequel.

(360 words)

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the **Dream Catcher**

english novel manuscript

by

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Part One

1

"I don't want to get married before my time, *Mma!* I'm too young! I'm only..."

"You aren't too young, Mpekana! I was married when I was only 18 and I..."

"No *Mma!*" said Rabeka Maru-a-pula, shaking her head, eyes tearful, downcast, and slightly blood-shot.

"No means disobe..." Mma-Rabeka, Rabeka's mother pointed an index finger.

"I want to do many things before marriage and children tie down my hands! I'm only twenty!"

Seated on a brand-new leather lounge suite which her father had bought with his retrenchment package, Rabeka blew her nose with a fresh soft tissue paper and wiped meandering tears. Mma-Rabeka heaved a sigh and gave Rabeka's father a facial expression suggesting: 'an ear nearby, hears for itself.' He responded with a blank look. Rabeka's parents were sitting in front of her on a bigger sofa. Avoiding eye-contact with her father, Rabeka kept eying her mother, making it clear that she was suspect number one who had played a role in 'selling' her.

Rabeka had during the past two Sundays seen her mother chatting and laughing with the sister of the young man, a fellow parishioner. Later she heard, according to the church procedure, he had requested that the church leadership should make his connubial desire known to her family.

Ezekiel Masubelele, a widower, popularly known as Sekiele - because his grandmother found it easier to pronounce - had seen Rabeka growing before his eyes as a shy girl playing *diketo* stones-game with other village girls. He was 32 years, and it was two years since his wife had tragically died in a car accident during a church women's league Easter conference. Rabeka, a well-brought 'Sunday school girl' attending Ethiopia Church, was ten years later, one of the teenagers lending a helping hand during miscellaneous church events.

Turned the most eligible bachelor in the congregation, Sekiele had twin girls aged three years. Industrious as a warthog, he was not given to folding his arms while hunger wielded deadly teeth: he was an owner of a kombi taxi which was often hired by the church for its umpteen events. He stayed with his elder, unmarried sister and two sisters to whom he had passed his mother's breast. Sekiele and his siblings lived in a family house which he had extended from four to eight rooms. He was a burly guy, with a well-fleshed face, looking five year older than his real age.

But those who know him very well were concerned that since his wife's death, there was something that was nibbling him down. Since June of that year his elder sister Mathilda, had been asking him: 'Is anxiety eating you up?' She had also been pestering him, giving him earfuls, to look for someone who would cook for him, wash his shirts and warm his bed. Sekiele's ready-made answer was: *I'm still praying.*

On Friday 2nd October, three months before her parents tried to marry off, Rabeka boarded Sekiele's taxi from Polokwane taxi rank to her village, Nobody, in the east of the town. She was very delighted to meet Sekiele, who in his heart said: *Mmulu what a lovely girl! And she seems to like me!*

"What puts you here Rabbeh? Has your big school closed so early this year?" inquired Sekiele.

"Our Technikon has closed because of a students' unrest, *buti* Sekiel," responded Rabeka.

"Ag, *shêm!* Let's hope the problem will be solved soon and you'll go back and complete your education."

Sekiele asked her to sit next to him and he chatted happily with her for the next six kilometers so that he hardly felt the distance, enjoying her body warmth and smell of perfume.

"Rabbeh, what are you studying?"

"Public Relations!"

"Public Relations?" he whistled just before he swung the steering wheel and steered the taxi off the road to off-load the first passenger, "You are indeed the first girl in Nopoti to do such a course."

Rabeka chuckled; Sekiele could see her tongue and he salivated.

"See you at the church!" Sekiele said to Rabeka as he handed her, her wheeled leather luggage bag, in front of her home. He fidgeted in his pocket, took out a ten rand note, grabbed Rabeka's hand with his left hand and put the note into her palm.

"Why are you giving me money? What is it...?" asked puzzled Rabeka.

"You can keep the taxi fare; you are still a student."

"No, *buti* Sekiel I can't just ride *mahala*. I must pay the fares!"

Sekiel almost put his fore-finger on her lips. "Shh!" He smiled at her, turned away from her and walked to his taxi. Rabeka did not know what to do –whether to run to him and give him his money or throw it away.

As she pulled the 'walking suitcase' and lifted it into the *lapa*, Sekiel watched her with amorous eyes from the rear-view mirror, saying to himself: *Today on Friday, the second day of October, heaven's door has opened.* He also chuckled to himself. *Sesi Thili*, he was referring to his elder sister, Mathilda, *will at last stop nagging me. I have met the one who will cook for me, wash my shirts and warm the bed!*

2

Rabeka related the sad news of how the students' unrest had led to the closure of the technikon, and the expulsion of all students before they wrote the end-of-year examinations.

"So this means I have thrown all my hard-earned cash into a rat-hole?" asked Rabeka's father, his eyes bulging.

Rabeka's father had used half of his R50 000 retrenchment package to pay for her fees at Technikon Witwatersrand. He had seen three men in the village investing their retrenchment packages in educating their daughters, and none of them had regretted doing so.

Tears glinting in her eyes, Rabeka did not respond to her father's question.

"Don't worry, Pap `a Rabeka," said Rabeka's mother, "God will wipe your tears, one day."

A focused look on Pap `a Rabeka convinced Mma-Rabeka that her comforting words had landed only in his ear, never touching the heart.

Mma-Rabeka brushed Pap `a Rabeka's arm. "An orphan who doesn't die awaits prosperity."

Pap `a Rabeka shook his head. "This has not been a good year for me, Mma-Rabeka. The kombi that I bought with nearly all the remaining money has taken instead of bringing money. I suspect that my taxi driver had been making me to suck his thumb, many times telling me that he had been robbed of all the daily takings. Rabeka's return from the technikon without writing examinations is like salt to a wound."

Mma-Rabeka and Rabeka listened intently to Pap `a Rabeka, who continued: "The repairs expenses of the kombi, have also dug into the money in the bank, and I feel that by December I will be forced to sell the kombi, because it has become a bag with holes. I must save money because I want to have a decent Christmas with my family. Rabeka, you are the child we hoped would be a source of help, but now that hope has miscarried. Your two elder sisters can't help because they have families and children to look after. And your younger sister and younger brother are waiting to be fed, clothed and to be taken to school. I had hoped you would relieve us financially when you earn a salary as Publicity Relations. Now look at what has happened..."

Pap `a Rabeka shook his head in desperation.

"Pap `a Rabeka, you have not wasted your money," comforted Mma-Rabeka, who added when she could see that Pap `a Rabeka was still not convinced, "What Rabeka has learned from the big books, no-one can steal it from her head."

Pap `a Rabeka disconsolately rested his cheek in his right palm.

Mma-Rabeka forced a smile towards Pap `a Rabeka. "God will wipe your tears, one day."

She hoped that if she kept repeating the words of comfort and hope, he would begin to believe in them.

3

That Sunday morning Sekiele awoke an hour earlier. He had dreamed of himself and Rabeka wearing dazzling wedding attire, as they were married in the church. He felt that his dream would come true. *My prayers have been answered!* mused Sekiele, *Today Sunday, the fourth day of October, I'm going to tell the Bishop that I have met the one who will cook for me, wash my shirts and warm the bed, Hallelujah!* He whistled as he polished his shoes and chose his best suit - a cream-white striped Monaco Unbeatable! He had shaved to look really young and sparkling.

At 11h00 sharp all members were seated waiting for *Mma-Bishopo*, the Bishop's wife to declare the 'Service for the Lord' open. The men and boys sat on the left while women and girls sat on the right of the Bishop, who stood facing them at the pulpit. The women and girls wore the ankle-length dresses and hats or doeks. Sekiele sneaked a glance towards the women's section and saw Rabeka, whose doek seemed to accentuate her 'boarding school' glowing coffee-coloured complexion.

Mma-Bishopo, lead the congregation with *Uthando Lwakhe* chorus, which they had been taught by their Gauteng isiZulu-speaking friends. Members of the congregation spoke Sepedi. All joined in singing the chorus, standing, clapping hands, gyrating and swinging to left and right. Suddenly *Mma-Bishopo* raised her hand, stopping the singing abruptly. "Tell me: is this how you will sing if Jesus, our Lord would enter this church?"

"No!" they shouted in unison.

They all sang again with gusto:

Uthando Lwakhe/ Uthando Lwakhe/ Uthando Lwakhe

Luyamangalisa/ Sihlala naye/Sihamba naye/ Silala naye/ Sivuka naye!

(His love, His love, His love / is amazing/ we stay with him/walk with him/ sleep and awake with him).

On the men's side Sekiele was the most enthusiastic, jumping the highest, singing with the loudest and most charming tenor, his hawk-eye on Rabeka, the flower of his love-hungry heart. Two days ago when she was one of the passengers, she looked a little provocative, he thought, with short knee-length tight dress, bangles, earrings, make-up and lipstick. Now in the "House of the Lord" without make-up, and those things which the church had disallowed, she looked serene, dignified and holy - the right qualities of a chaste young woman for an eligible bachelor.

After the 'business-as-usual' slice of time, Bishop Manasseh Tau-ya-Tswala, a bespectacled burly and tall light complexioned man with half of his head getting bald, preached about 'The Parable of the Sower.' When the Bishop read: 'But some seed fell on good ground, sprang up and yielded a crop a hundred-fold,' Sekiele nodded smiled whispering 'Hallelujah!', his heart galloping with joy.

Sekiele hardly listened for the rest of the message; his mind was turning around with a vision of him and Rabeka, as a married couple... he could also picture him and Rabeka getting into his Kombi with his two little girls and *their* sweet infant sleeping peacefully in Rabeka's arms... later having their Sunday lunch in great joy...

At the end of the sermon Sekiele was convinced he was part of the people whose seeds had fallen on the rock and not on the wayside to be swallowed by 'the birds of the air.'

After the service the congregants gaily exchanged handshakes and chatted in little groups. After a few obligatory handshakes Sekiele intended to make a beeline to Rabeka who was mobbed by both teenagers, young women and older women, all smiling and exchanging firm handshakes with the 'girl from boarding school.' They were delighted to see her in the church again; they had missed her favourite gospel song: *What a mighty God we serve*.

Sekeile decided to be unkind to himself and postponed greeting Rabeka. *I think it's a good idea to keep a discreet distance from Rabbeh*, mused Sekiel, as he walked to the Bishop's office; there he sat in the waiting room.

"Mr Ezekiel Masubelele," the Bishop addressed Sekiele formally, after he had helped the older people, "what can I do for you, sir?"

The Bishop was in the company of his assistant, Thomas Malema, known among the parishioners as the 'Bishop's hand.'

Sekiele smiled and licked his upper-lip. "Honourable Bishop, the fowler," he pointed to his chest, "has seen a dove flattering the wings, and he wants to catch it!"

The Bishop smiled at Sekiele before shifting his gaze and smile to Malema.

"Who's the fortunate girl?" asked the Bishop.

Sekiele took his time as he chuckled with relish. "Rabeka, child of Maru-a-pula."

The Bishop and 'his hand' nodded and smiled to each other.

"We know the family, we know the girl," said the Bishop, "and we've no doubt that you've made an excellent choice."

Malema nodded, and began to give Sekiele a thoughtful gaze. The Bishop detected that 'his hand' was 'eating the bones of his head' as the villagers said when they waxed idiomatic. So the Bishop looked at Malema with eyes that said 'over to you!'

Malema heaved a sigh. "Young man, you have indeed given us news as sweet as honey, and we rejoice with you." he paused. "We know you are in hurry like all lovers bitten by the louse of love. But I want to offer some advice: 'walking is better than running.'"

The bishop nodded. "According to the procedure of the church, you will have to wait for a month. If it was just a fancy of the moment it'll cool off, but if it's genuine love, it will be as hot as the sun of Phalaborwa."

The Bishop, Malema and Sekiele had a good laugh.

"I have heard you very well, my honourable leaders," said Sekiele softly.

"So let's talk again four weeks later," said the Bishop.

"And please keep a clean distance from the girl," added Malema.

"I'll do that," responded Sekiele emphasising with a nod, a shy smile covering his face.

4

During the second Sunday in December Sekiele went to church in high spirits - his spiritual fervour blended with red-hot desire to have Rabeka as his heaven-given wife.

"Honourable Bishop," said Sekiele, "I'm delighted to inform you that I have waited for more than four weeks. And I have kept a clean distance from the girl," his gaze had pointed to Malema.

"And you feel the desire comes from God and not the devil?" ascertained the Bishop with a smile.

"The desire comes from God, Hallelujah Bishop!" insisted Sekiele, his eyes glinting with nothing but confidence.

The Bishop asked Sekiele to go and wait in the waiting room for minutes that do not finish the fingers of one hand.

"Mr Masubelele," said the Bishop as Sekiele put his buttock on the chair, "we've chewed the matter and Malema will tell you what's going to happen".

Malema coughed to straighten his throat. "We shall speak to the girl's parents next Sunday. If they agree...I know they will, then they should speak to the girl, and if she agrees...I'm certain no right-thinking girl cannot childishly say 'no!' to such a good guy as you- then before you part with lobola, we are going to ask you to produce your bank book."

The following Sunday after the service the Bishop and Malema called Mma-Rabeka and Pap 'a Rabeka to the church office.

"In our language we say when you're summoned you become anxious," said the smiling Bishop, looking at the faces of Rabeka's parents wearing anxiety. "We've called you to share the good news with you."

The Bishop smiled and paused until he was satisfied that Rabeka's parents were beginning to relax. "There is a young man in this church who's singing the song: '*Rotwane e labile lapeng la'bo kgarebe!*'" (The suitor's walking stick is pointing in the direction of the girl's homestead)

Rabeka's parents exchanged smiles before they all burst with laughter. The Bishop and Malema laughed with them.

"Yes, it's true, people of Maru-a-pula," added Malema, "a young man is beating the soil with a walking stick in the direction of your house, and he will wait at the entrance of *kapa* saying '*Koko!*'"

Rabeka's parents looked at each other again, this time, their faces crisscrossed by pleasant shock.

"As you are familiar with the tradition of the church," continued the Bishop, "when a young man desires a young woman to be his wife he must speak to the church leaders. Last month a young man has bitten our ears, that he desires to have your daughter as his wife. And we said to him 'please wait and pray for at least four weeks.' Last Sunday the eligible bachelor came to see us and we asked him 'do you feel your desire comes from God and not the devil?'"

"And he replied," Malema took over, "'The desire comes from God, Hallelujah!'" The Bishop smiled at Rabeka's parents who smiled back. "And we said to him: 'We shall speak to the girl's parents next Sunday. If they agree, then they should speak to the girl,

and if she agrees, we are going to ask you to produce your bank book, before the lobola negotiations begin.' Have I left out anything, Malema?"

"No Bishop," responded Malema, 'you have hit the bull's horn *rrwa!*' Malema and the Bishop smiled at Rabeka's parents who had the sun on their faces. Pap 'a Rabeka looked downward, scratched his beard and rose his head. "Who's the young man?" he asked.

"If you see him, you'll know him," Malema refused to come up with the desired news.

"Please bring down what you've hidden up there for we the dogs are getting tired necks," Pap 'a Rabeka said.

"He's Mr Ezekiel Masubelele!" announced the Bishop proudly. Rabeka's parents exchanged glances and smiles, Mma-Rabeka's smile outshining her husbands.

"We don't want to put you under any pressure," said the Bishop before Rabeka's parents had recovered from the news, "You can think over the matter with a spirit of prayer and come back to us when time is ripe. And we request you: do not be in hurry to tell the girl."

"Perhaps you can tell her early next year," suggested Malema. The Bishop nodded, looking at Rabeka's parents.

"The news is indeed like a milk-pail facing the cow's teats, bursting with milk," said Pap 'a Rabeka smiling at Mma-Rabeka; she smiled back to him and beamed towards the Bishop and Malema.

Suddenly Malema snapped his index finger and thumb as they shuffled out of the office. "I have an idea!"

"Tell us Malema!" said the Bishop.

"You know what? We must be as clever as herd boys - we know how herd boys catch a *ntshare*-bird with *sepankane*, the bird-catcher, they cover it with some soil so that the bird should see only a worm and not the killer trapping part."

The Bishop, and Rabeka's parents all gave Malema puzzled facial expressions.

"Okay let me explain," said Malema, "Why don't we give the young man and the girl some common church-related assignments that will put them together? For example, our church youth will be going to the picnic on the New Year's Day."

Mma-Rabeka's face suddenly radiated a smile and her eyes twinkled.

"Yes, the girl could collect the money for the trip and hand it with the list to the young man," Malema continued, "During the trip and at the picnic spot Sekiele and the girl will be together."

"I agree with Malema," said the Bishop, "we must be wise because today's young people are shrewder than us."

New Year's day arrived at last. At the church two 14-seater combis drove out of the yard. The driver of the leading combi was Sekiele; next to him sat Rabeka. The previous Sunday Malema had given Sekiele words that built him up. *It's better to wait for the right time than to mess your life. Your sacrifice is worthwhile. In the bible we read that Jacob slaved for Rachel and seven years were like seven days and he was a happier man in the end.*

Like the other girls Rabeka had put on a tight pair of jeans. During such youth events the church accommodated and tolerated the things and living styles regarded as 'outward and worldly:' things such as earrings, make-up, jeans and lipstick. She had also applied a perfume which he found very pleasant.

During the journey Sekiele enjoyed Rabeka's body warmth and perfume; they chatted merrily until the kombi halted *tsii!* at the Chueniespoort Holiday resort. The whole day Sekiele and Rabeka were like a cow and a tick, sharing their meals, playing together, laughing, sharing jokes, playing on the same merry-go-round, and riding a horse. Sekiele was the only young man who could afford a two-seater cable cart; up there as the cable cruised to another end Sekiele found himself caressing Rabeka's hip tenderly, but *Leave me alone Satan!* he whispered to himself just in time. Sekiele also took many photos with the flower of his heart. To the church youth it became very evident that Rabeka was being groomed as Mrs Masubelele. The girls had envied Rabeka as the girl for whom the wedding bells would soon toll; some girls ravaged by jealousy could not look at Rabeka in the eye or speak to her.

As he drove back to the village Sekiele kept thinking: *Today ruri my prayers have been answered! Sesi Thili will at last stop nagging me. I have at last met the one who will cook for me, wash my shirts and warm the bed, Hallehujah!!*

5

A few days after the new year's unforgettable picnic Sekiele showed his sisters some picnic photos: where he appeared with Rabeka, Mr and Mrs Masubelele to-be, sitting next to each other, holding hands and exchanging delicious smiles. His sisters all agreed that Rabeka would indeed make a suitable wife for their adorable brother. Elder sister Mathilda gave a word of advice. "Put the photos in your bible, and pray hard *buti!*"

"Thank you *sesi Thili!*" appreciated Sekiele, "Your words are like seed that have fallen on a rich soil."

Mathilda gave Sekiele a reassuring smile. "And you are going to reap a good harvest!"

For two weeks in January Sekiele recalled Malema's words of encouragement: *Jacob slaved for Rachel and seven years were like seven days and he was a happier man in the end.* He faithfully continued to insert Rabeka's photos in the bible, prayed and rubbed the bible with his palms until the holy book was hot with what he believed to be heaven's fire.

When Rabeka showed her mother the picnic photos, Mma-Rabeka was exceedingly delighted that what had been carefully plotted – to cause Rabeka and Sekiele to be together- would soon bear some luscious fruits. Mma-Rabeka started to have umpteen excuses to visit Sekiele's house where she would chat and laugh with Mathilda; even before and after the church services, the two would as the villagers were put it 'a finger and a nail'. Expecting the *li-li-li-li-lili* wedding bells to toll soon, Mma-Rabeka persuaded Rabeka's father's to use part of the retrenchment package money to buy a Gomma-gomma leather lounge suite.

"We should make a good impression, Papa 'a Rabeka," Mma-Rabeka persuaded Rabeka's father, "so that those who attend the wedding should see that Rabeka does not come from a family of 'short-sleeved' people."

On the third Sunday Sekiele whistled as he polished his shoes before he put on his best suit, the cream-white striped Monaco Unbeatable! As he drove to the church with his sisters and his two little girls as passengers, he thought *Today Sunday, the fifteenth day of January, I'm going to tell the Bishop that it's about time that I should have the one who will cook for me, wash my shirts and warm the bed, Hallehujah!*

Brief and to the point Sekiele poured the contents of his heart to the Bishop and Malema. During a brief meeting Rabeka's parents told Bishop, Malema that they would tell Rabeka about Sekiele's marriage proposal that Sunday afternoon.

6

After lunch which they normally finished at 14h00, Rabeka's parents had their usual two-hour siesta. They had sent Rabeka's younger brother and sister to one of Rabeka's elder sister, so that they could have time alone with Rabeka. Just after 16h00 Rabeka brought her parents tea and muffins. After having tea Mma-Rabeka asked her daughter to bring the picnic photos, and she obliged.

"Please sit down Mpekana," Mma-Rabeka radiated a chummy smile to her daughter who was ready to go and do a few chores, "Your father and I would like to speak to you," Mma-Rabeka smiled charmingly as she passed a photo to Pap 'a Rabeka. "Oh Mr Masubelele looks so nice and charming!"

It was the first time that Mma-Rabeka had formally addressed Sekiel as 'Mr Masubelele.'

Pap 'a Rabeka nodded and smiled as he gazed at the next photo.

"And the young man is a hard worker," added Mma-Rabeka, "he's a good guy and he's faithful."

Pap 'a Rabeka cleared his throat. "Mpekana, we want to talk to you about something that we as your parents know, will make your life better. This young man from Masubelele family... I'm talking about Sekiele, has approached the Bishop and Mma-Bishop according to the tradition of the church. The leaders have carefully evaluated him and his request, and they feel he's a good guy who needs a good girl in the church. Sekiele told the leaders that his suitor's walking stick is pointing towards our house. To put it straight, Sekiele has made a request to the leaders that he desires you to be his wife."

Having grown up and raised in the church Rabeka knew what her parents were talking about. Her two elder sisters were married in the church, by young men who had confessed to the church leadership about how they were shown their future wives in their holy dreams. Before Rabeka returned from the Technikon she heard about how a young woman whom she had addressed as 'sis Phuti,' a social worker employed by the Limpopo province's Department of Social Development, had married a young man in the church.

Mma-Rabeka gave Rabeka a sweet smile. "Mpekana, you were not born yesterday. You are now a big girl; most of your peers in the village have children. We are not saying you should have a child. As your father said, we are suggesting something that we know will make your life better. Sekiele is a hard-working man, a church-going man who has a house. All the girls at the church will envy you; in fact some are going to hate you. Sekiele will look after you; he will have money to send you to school. You and Sekiele are going to make a good couple; you can see by the photos." Mma-Rabeka chuckled. "Mma-Bishop told me she wished he could be her son-in-law. Mpekana, can you appreciate how fortunate you are?"

Rabeka blushed and never said a word.

"Mpekana you're not a small girl," said Mma-Rabeka, her tone tinged with authority, "you've heard me. Now what are you saying?"

Again Rabeka kept her lips tight, casting her glance downwards towards her mother's shoes and then above her head. Her pupils began to be dewy, and her mother saw that as tears of joy and thankfulness.

"Mma, I don't want to get married before my time! I'm too young! I'm only twenty-one! I want to do many things before I am tied down by marriage and children!" said Rabeka her tearful, slightly blood-shot eyes, glinting with defiance she was showing for the first time.

"Mpekana, do you remember that I was only eighteen?" responded Mma-Rabeka, "when I married your father, and I gave birth to you at nineteen?"

"I know mamma! That was your own decision. That was your culture. But now things have changed."

"Good things never change. Marriage is still a good thing, and it's a blessing..."

"Mma, aren't you proud of me when I want to get education and better things in life before I get married? I want to read big fat books and have big education and..."

"You're dreaming my girl!, And you are..."

"Yes, I've big dreams, *mama*."

"Mpekana, don't think you're cleverer than graduates such as Phuti! She works for the government and she drives a car, but she married in the church..."

"But she's older than me!"

"It's an advantage to start early. You don't seem to appreciate how fortunate you are, Mpekana. Marriage is very scarce these days, Young men don't marry these days; they just want to live with young educated girls in flats without marrying them."

Pap 'a Rabeka raised his open palm towards Rabeka, ready to speak. "Now here is a good young man who wants to give you a better future. A hard-working man, a church-going man who has a house, a car, and he'll take you to school; we can't give you any better education because I have lost my job, and at my age I may not get any paying job. Who wants to hire an old horse like me?"

"Your father sold the kombi and also bought the Gomma-gomma sofas we are sitting on."

Rabeka shook her head. "No papa and *mama*, I don't want to be sold like Salamina! And you know what has happened to her."

Mma-Rabeka and Pap 'a Rabeka recalled the tragic story of Salamina who lived at another village. Her mother had married her off to a local supermarket owner she had owed. Rabeka's parents were not pleased to be reminded about Salamina's miserable

story.

"Don't tell us about Salamina," said Mma-Rabeka angrily, "we are talking about a marriage in the church. All young men and women who married in the church are happily married."

"It's their choices, *mma*!" reasoned Rabeka, "What worked for them does not suit me. Because I have my own life and my dreams."

Suddenly Pap`a Rabeka stood up, his face telling a story of anger. "Mma-Rabeka just give your daughter a woman-to-woman talk and make her understand. I'm going to tend the garden."

Following a two-minute tension-mounting pause, Mma-Rabeka looked at Rabeka with eyes that seemed to say: 'Why don't you speak?'

"*Mma*, I don't want to get married because of material things. I must get married because there is love. Besides *mma*, I don't just feel I... I don't feel I have warm feelings towards *buti* Sekiel."

"Love will grow, bud and bear fruits. I'm talking from experience," her mother assured.

"Do you mean...?"

"Yes!" Rabeka's mother cut in, "I have learned to love your father. I had known him as a distant cousin, on my mother's side."

"I'm not going to bother learning to love any one! I don't want to live the way you've lived. That was your culture. But now things have changed."

"I told you that good things never change!"

"*Mma*, I know I have no love and will never have love for Sekiel! I told you I want to do many things before I am tied down by marriage and children!"

Mma-Rabeka sighed heavily and stepped closer to Rabeka, looking straight into her eyes. "Mpekana, you're going to follow the law of your parents and the law of God. You're going to be obedient, do you hear me? Do you think that your elder sisters and Phuti are stupid by marrying...?"

"It's their choices!"

"Mpekana, have you forgotten the fifth commandment?"

Upset Rebeka stood up and walked out of the lounge, heading straight towards to her bed-room.

"Where are you going? Sit down!" commanded Mma-Rabeka. "I'm still speaking, and I want none of your backchat! Do you hear me?"

Rabeka continued to walk, wiping tears; Mma-Rabeka followed her.

"The fifth commandment says: 'Honour your father and mother,'" continued Mma-Rabeka as Rebeka disappeared into her bed-room "So that you may live longer!

Rabeka banged the door behind her, lay on her bed and cried aloud. Mma-Rabeka opened the door of Rabeka's bed-room, surveyed her daughter from her feet to her head, closed the door and walked away. Mma-Rabeka nearly collided with Pap`a Rabeka at the kitchen door. She was going to the garden to call him.

"What's happening? Why is Mpekana crying like a pig being slaughtered?" Mma-Rabeka just shrugged her shoulders. Pap`a Rabeka gave Mma-Rabeka a stern look. "Please give your daughter a woman-to-woman talk and make her understand!" said Pap`a Rabeka who turned his back and returned to the garden; he stopped at the doorway of the kitchen, turned towards her and waved a finger. "And she must stop behaving like

a little girl with mucous on her upper-lip! We are trying to help her but she is biting the hands that are putting food into her mouth! ”

Mma-Rabeka sat next to Rabeka and began to pat her shoulder. “Don’t cry my child. You have grown bigger to see such things. But you are not alone. We, your parents have seen many days. God put us in charge of you so that we must protect you, and see to it you don’t make a mistake that you’ll regret for the rest of your life. That’s why the fifth commandment says: ‘Honour your father and mother so that you should live longer.’ These days many young people don’t live longer because they don’t honour their parents. You are a well-brought up girl; you honour us, and you’ll live longer. Don’t cry my child. I’m going to ask your father that we should give you time to think over this matter. Can we speak to you again tomorrow morning?”

“I’ve already made up my mind. I told you that I don’t want to get married for material reasons. I’ll get married because there is love. I also told you that I don’t feel I’ve warm feelings towards *buti Sekiel*.”

“I told you: love will grow!”

“No, *mma*, no! But why don’t you...?” she began to sob, and covered her face with her right palm.

Again Mma-Rabeka patted Rabeka’s shoulder-blade, reminded of the times when she was a two-month’s infant. For the next thirty minutes Mma-Rabeka tried to speak to her daughter without minuscule success. Twenty minutes later Mma-Rabeka shuffled out of Rabeka’s bed-room, bracing herself for a question that she expects would come from Pap’a Rabeka’s lips: *Did you have a good woman-to-woman talk with Mpekana? Has she at last understood?*

Pap’a Rabeka never asked the anticipated question. They sat in the lounge listening to gospel music on TV. It was 18h00 when Rabeka’s elder sister, Maropeng and her husband’s car stopped at the gate and off-loaded Rabeka’s siblings.

“Mma, is *sesi Mpekana* sick?” inquired Tumelo, Rabeka’s brother.

“She’s not feeling very well,” replied Mma-Rabeka.

“What’s she suffering from? Red eyes?” Semakaleng, the last born wanted to know.

“Yes!” agreed Mma-Rabeka, greatly relieved.

“I see her eyes are red!”

At 21h00 Rabeka’s mother entered Rabeka’s room with a tray loaded with light supper and fruit cock-tail. She found Rabeka sleeping.

Mma-Rabeka gently thumbed Rabeka’s shoulder “Mpekana, wake up and eat!”

Rabeka awoke.

“Sit on your buttocks and eat!” commanded Mma-Rabeka.

Rabeka sat up, resting soles of her feet on the mat. Mma-Rabeka handed her the tray and gave her an affectionate smile which she sustained; without getting any positive feedback from Rabeka she walked out of the bed-room.

When Mma-Rabeka came back an hour later she found the food un-eaten, the cocktail un-drunk. Realising it would not be worthwhile awaking Rabeka, Mma-Rabeka tiptoed and bowed to check if Rabeka was breathing. Relieved that Rabeka was breathing Mma-Rabeka took the tray and walked out of the bed-room.

7

On Monday morning Rabeka awoke at 09h00. When her mother and father greeted her she never responded. Mma-Rabeka brought her breakfast. Mma-Rabeka checked Rabeka thirty minutes later and found that she had not touched the food and tea. Realising that she had never drank any liquid nor ate any solid food for over 24 hours, her parents held a discussion in hushed tones. They decided to take Rabeka to a medical practitioner who diagnosed depression and fatigue. The doctor gave her some tablets. He recommended that the parents should treat Rabeka sensitively.

That Tuesday Rabeka ate lunch and supper although she ate little food. She spoke less to her parents and more to her siblings.

"Papa," Mma-Rabeka spoke to Pap 'a Rabeka on Friday evening, "Mpekana might be eating but she's no longer that old jolly girl we are used to."

"I agree. What do you suggest we should do Mma-Rabeka?"

"Perhaps we should ask your sister to speak to her. Mpekana is in good terms with my sister-in-law."

They were referring to Pap 'a Rabeka's youngest sister whom Rabeka addressed as Rakgadi Mpule, a lady teacher at the local primary school. In her early 40s Mpule, a widow and mother three children aged 10, 12 and 15, was the family member they had merely tolerated, because they had no other choice. Mpule was a relative they visited the least. While they couldn't say they had disliked her, the relatives agreed that she did not quite fit their mould. After her husband whom she had married in the church attended by Rabeka parents, a family church, had died, she left the church.

She went to join known among as the villagers as 'Jackie's church' a church of 'born-again' and 'a church of boys and girls', started and headed by a young male teacher, her colleague, and former pupil, Jacob Mashiane.

Mpule was the oldest person and member of "Jackie's church" whose official name was Christ-Centred Cathedral, or CCC. Jackie had appointed her as the elder and an associate pastor. Membership to CCC was not the only thing which made Mpule and her relatives not really see eye-to-eye. The second issue was the fact that she had declined several marriage proposals justifying 'Jesus is my husband.' But whenever they had family and personal problems, and children's academic matters they often consulted her, and she would boldly declare: "I'll pray with you, and I'm trusting God for an answer!"

That Saturday Mpule at last came to see Rabeka. After listening to Rabeka attentively for about an hour Mpule prayed.

"You said you want to do many things before you are tied down by marriage and children?" asked Mpule as she zipped her bible into a leather carrier, "You also said you have big dreams?"

"Yes Rakgadi Mpule."

"What are your big dreams Rabbeh?"

"I want to be a star Rakgadi Mpule. I want to sing and dance, make money and come back to the village to build a sort of a training centre for girls and young women who have dropped out of school, and teach them how to be better people, instead of just hoping that a man will come and save them; I don't want the girls to be like Salamina... maybe I'm too much of a dreamer, Rakgadi Mpule!"

"Hallelujah to your dreams!" Mpule punched her bible, "Keep dreaming, my girl! Joseph was a dreamer and he ended up in the palace as a prime minister of Egypt!"

Sitting behind the house with Pap`a Rabeka, Mma-Rabeka gave her husband a knowing glance. "Oh that zealot has started again!" said Mma-Rabeka who heard Mpule shouting "Hallelujah."

"I just hope that she'll not put poison into Mpekana's head," commented Pap`a Rabeka.

A few minutes later Mma-Rabeka and Pap`a Rabeka saw Rabeka and Mpule walking in the street. Mpule was speaking and Rabeka was laughing.

"Look at Mpekana! Glowing like a full moon!" exclaimed Mma-Rabeka, "Now she looks the usual jolly Mpekana we are used to!"

Pap`a Rabeka nodded.

Mpule shook Rabeka's hand and walked away to her house. After taking a few paces Mpule stopped and beckoned to Rabeka, who hurried closer her aunt.

"If being a star is what God has given you," said Mpule, "then you must do it and you will be successful because God is good! I will pray for you so that God should protect your dream and give you wisdom to pursue and to achieve it."

"Thank you very much Rakgadi Mpule! I had lost hope. Now I feel encouraged!" Rabeka hugged and kissed Mpule, and both walked away with smiles. However Rabeka's smile vanished when she entered her home.

8

"I told your father," Mma-Rabeka smiled at Rabeka "that you were glowing like a full moon, as you talked to your aunt!"

Rabeka did not respond.

"We are waiting," said Mma-Rabeka "to see the usual jolly Mpekana."

"I'm okay, Mma," said Rabeka softly as she was helping to slice and chop a Sunday-meal pumpkin.

Mma-Rabeka was not convinced that Rabeka was 'okay' as the family knew and were used to her. She also felt Rabeka might not be ready to go to church the next day.

On Sunday Mma-Rabeka asked Rabeka to prepare pudding and custard – a thick custard as her father had preferred it.

"Why is *sesi* Mpekana not going with us to church?" inquired little Semakaleng, who added, "Is she still suffering from red eyes?"

"She's getting better, but we are going to ask the Bishop to pray for her," said Mma-Rabeka diplomatically.

That Sunday Sekiele whistled as he polished his shoes before he put on a green Italian-styled suit. He drove to the church with his sisters and his two little girls as passengers thinking *Today Sunday, I'm going to hear the good news from the Bishop that Rabeh has agreed to be my wife- the one who will cook for me, wash my shirts and warm the bed, Hallelujah!*

Mma-Bishopo, led the congregation with her favourite chorus, *Uthando Lwakhe*, and all joined, stood, clapped hands and began to gyrate and swung to left and right.

Sekiele did not jump and sing with the loudest and most charming tenor. *Aowaa!* He sat down keeping his dignity, waiting for the time for church notices; he expected that it would be announced that he would be Rabeka's fiancé officially. They all sang *Uthando Lwakhe*, with gusto.

Sekiele sneaked a glance towards the women's section expecting to see Rabeka, with her doek accentuating her glowing coffee-coloured 'boarding school' complexion. He could not see her. *Perhaps the Bishop and her parents have hidden her somewhere to take me and the congregation by surprise*, Sekiele comforted himself.

The Bishop preached: "Beloved in Christ, we shall find the key scriptures for today in Saint Matthew Chapter 7 verses seven and eight: 'Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you; For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him that knocks it will be opened.'"

Adjusting his spectacles, the Bishop smiled in the direction of Sekiele. *The Bishop is smiling at me*, thought Sekiele, *because I know my prayers have been answered. Hallelujah!* He had never failed for a single day to insert Rabeka's photos in the bible, and he prayed hard, as he was advised by his sister, Mathilda. So he had no doubt that his prayers had been answered. He had waited for weeks, and he was convinced he would be a happier man in the end.

When the notices were read by a local male teacher as usual, nothing about him and Rabeka was mentioned; but he still hoped there might be a surprise announcement from the Bishop himself.

An hour later, when smiling Sekiele entered the Bishop's office he expected to see Rabeka sandwiched by her parents. Rabeka's parents who had informed the Bishop about the bad news before the service started, had gone home. The Bishop and Malema smiled at Sekiele as he pulled his chair and sat.

"Mr Masubelele," Malema's smile vanished, "We have encouraged you to be patient like Jacob: he slaved for Rachel and seven years were like seven days and he was a happier man in the end. Today we are still encouraging you to be a Jacob, to be a farmer who after sowing some seed should expect a harvest – even if it does not look that it will rain."

Sekiele's heart began to sink; he felt they were preparing him for disappointment. Softening the disappointment they told him briefly that it seemed Rabeka was not yet ready to open to him emotionally.

"Women are strange creatures," said the Bishop. "Sometimes a 'No' is in fact a way of saying 'Wait!'" Bishop paused. "We know you are disappointed but please remember that you are a follower of Christ; so refuse to be disappointed, and don't hate her or treat her like an enemy. Our Lord says we must pray for our enemies."

Yes I have faithfully inserted Rabeka's photos in the bible, thought Sekiele, *And I prayed and rubbed the bible with my palms until it was hot with God's favour! What might have gone wrong? Sesi Thili said 'Pray hard buti!' Perhaps I haven't prayed hard enough. I should have fasted for seven days!*

9

For the next three Sundays Rabeka never attended her parents' church. Her parents never asked her to go with them to church; they wanted to see her volunteering to be part of them. On February 11 her parents agreed when Mpule invited Rabeka to Christ Centred Cathedral.

"It would be better for Mpekana to attend Jackie's church than no church at all," Mma-Rabeka had justified to Pap 'a Rabeka who never argued; he conceded that his wife was right.

As Rabeka got into Mpule's car, Mma-Rabeka noticed that her daughter 'glowed like a full moon,' as she had told Pap 'a Rabeka a week ago.

Mpule scanned Rabeka from her head to her legs and smiled at her. "Next week don't put on those long dresses and doeks. We are a modern church; our girls and boys look cool; our girls put on slacks, short dresses, earrings, make-up and lipstick. We aren't old-fashioned like your parents' church; I left it because I found it stifling. It's a backward church. You are going to enjoy every minute at CCC."

After the church service Rabeka's smile did not vanish when she entered her home. She found the family having lunch. Mma-Rabeka observed that in addition to glowing like a moon, her daughter had a red rose fastened on the left side of her chest.

"I'm sorry I'm late for lunch," said Rabeka, "Pastor Jackie invited me and Rakgadi Mpule for lunch."

Her parents exchanged knowing glances and continued eating.

"How was your church, *sese* Mpekana?" asked Semakaleng.

"Very nice. I was enthusiastically welcomed!"

"Has Pastor Jackie given you that flower?" inquired curious Tumelo.

"When I was welcomed as someone coming for the first time, one of the church workers came and put this flower on my chest. The flower is a rose; it reminds me of our Lord Jesus, as the Rose of Sharon."

Her parents again looked at each other and continued eating.

Preparing about to go to CCC which she was attending for the third Sunday, Rabeka stood in front of the mirror and applied a peach-flavoured lipstick. She had spent some time applying make-up which matched with her mustard knee-length dress. She had also polished her nails and put on some bangles. On her forehead she had hung a centimeter-wide multi-coloured bead. She had asked Mpule not to fetch her insisting that she didn't mind to walk to the church.

As Rabeka was about to walk out of her bedroom Semakaleng cried. "*Sese* Mpekana I want to go with you to the church of beautiful people," Semakaleng grabbed Rabeka by her hand, and refused to budge. Without any fuss Rabeka's parents relented to Semakaleng's request.

Rabeka had walked half-way to the church when she saw a white BMW slowing down past her and parking out of the dirt-road. She saw bald-headed man with sunglasses resting on his head, his face clean-shaven, smiling at her.

'Hi, ' said the guy, 'can I give you a lift?'

'No thanks, I'm okay,' said Rabeka. 'I don't mind walking.'

The man smacked his lips. 'A beautiful young thing like you deserves a BM. Com'on jump into the car! I will take you...' .

'No uncle!'

'Hey sweet one, never 'uncle' me! I'm JR! Everybody knows me!'

'I don't know you... I was at the boarding school last year.'

'I know! That's why I want to take care of you. I can buy you nice clothes and a cell-phone. Come baby!'

Semakaleng tugged at Rabeka's arm; Rabeka strutted away with Semakaleng.

'I'll get you!' said JR as he revved and drove away. 'No girl says 'No!' to JR!'

That Sunday afternoon Mpule dropped Rabeka at the wood and fence gate of her home. Radiant and bright-faced Rabeka with the bible tucked under her arm-pit, sang a gospel song and Semakaleng embellished with a little girl's voice. Her parents saw their girls through the bedroom window.

"The Bishop spoke to me about Rabeka," said Pap'a-Rabeka. "He feels we haven't acted wisely by allowing the girl to go to the church of boys and girls. I agree with him. He calls it the church of harlots, because of the way the girls and women dress."

Mma-Rabeka briefly chewed what she had been given, with the jaws and teeth of her mind. "Pap'a-Rabeka, as I said before it would be better for Mpekana to attend Jackie's church than no church at all. I think we should be thankful that the girl is full of joy, and the church is keeping her away from parties, liquor and boys."

Pap'a-Rabeka wanted to argue further but he swallowed his words, hoping an opportunity for 'I told you' would come in future.

Rabeka found her cousin, Keletjo, daughter of her older aunt waiting for her in the lounge where she was watching TV. Rabeka was delighted to see her cousin whom she had not seen since she left her parents' church a month ago. After lunch when Rabeka's parents took a two-hour siesta, the girls were alone in the kitchen, busy with the Sunday afternoon chores.

"Rabbeh, how's Jackie's church?" asked Keletjo.

"I was wonderfully welcomed during my first visit, Kele. They gave me a red rose, and after the church all the girls came to give me hand-shakes and hugs. The pastor invited me and Rakgadi Mpule for lunch. I like the church, I like the music, the preaching, the people and everything about the church. When I'm asleep I just dream about the church."

"Your excitement is infectious Rabbeh. Everybody can see that you are happy at that church. Some of us wish we were you."

"And how's the Church of Ethiopia?"

"We miss you terribly. You've left a vacuum no-one can fill with your favourite gospel song: *What a mighty God we serve*.

'I'm delighted about that.'

"But let me be honest with you: You did well by not coming to the church. If you dare put your foot at the church they will eat you with their teeth. Everybody in the church is angry that you have rebuffed Sekiel's marriage proposal. My mother says you have done something very stupid because marriage is scarce these days. The girls in the

church are saying 'throw away, and we shall receive!'"

Rabeka digested what Keletjo had just told her. "And how's *buti* Sekiel?"

"He's heart-broken. Some people say he looks like a wet cold hen. I think he comes to the church because he has to transport his sisters and his daughters."

"I didn't mean to be mean to him. I told my mother that I cannot marry Sekiel because I have big dreams, and she says I think I'm cleverer than graduates like Phuti who married a man in the church. Everybody tells me that Sekiel has a car and a house, and I'm saying material things cannot fill that space in my heart. I have big dreams, Kele, dreams bigger than the village of Nobody."

"To be honest with you Rabbeh, you don't quite fit into the village. You're right Rabbeh: your dreams must be bigger than Nobody."

10

During the first Saturday of March in the afternoon Rabeka had gone to the newly opened Ngwan'a-Makgabo Shopping Centre to buy some groceries. As she walked across a parking space in front of the shopping mall she heard a car honking. When she looked around she saw bald-headed JR, waving from a white BMW, sunglasses resting on his head, as usual. She ignored him, and walked on and joined the dirt-road street. She walked on the right side of the street, facing the on-coming cars.

JR's car driven drove past Rabeka and then made a u-turn and cruised towards her. She was about to cross to the other side but she decided to wait; she was scared but she did not want to show it; she remembered that when a dog barks at you or wants to bite you, don't panic because it will choose you. The car driver parked the car right out of the dirt road with Rabeka on his right. Rabeka began to freeze with fright but she did want to show it. She had heard nasty stories about JR. He was in the company of two guys.

JR smiled at Rabeka. 'Hi, beautiful young thing!'

Rabeka ignored him and continued walking.

'Hey, babe, when JR calls you don't try to give him a stiff-neck okay! I am the only guy who can make you somebody! Without me you are a nobody. You're the only girl I haven't slept with in this village, com'on jump into my BM now!'

JR's side-kick opened the rear door and stepped out. At that juncture another car stopped behind JR's car. Rabeka recognized the car and dashed towards it.

"I want to make you famous," JR shouted at Rabeka, "But you're playing big in a small village! Sis, *skobo!*"

JR's car drove away as Rabeka jumped into the car of a local teacher, Timothy Matlamela, known among his peers as TM.

"I'm sorry Teacher Matlamela. I had to jump into your car because I'm avoiding that terrible man!"

"It's okay, I understand Rebecca."

She told him all what transpired between her and JR.

"*Gaa!* What a cheap boaster!" responded TM. "He's the one playing big in small village! You know a crab doesn't know that he can't walk straight; he only sees how other crabs can't walk straight."

"How does he make a living?" asked Rabeka.

"JR owns shebeens in several villages. There are rumours that he's a master-mind of bank robberies, car-hijacks and dealing with drugs. There are many stories about this guy. You know why he calls himself JR?"

"I don't know."

"He has a striking resemblance with a well-known TV and stage actor, Darlington Michaels. This guy went to Pretoria and once saw a play in which Michaels was acting in a stage play called Jack-Rollers; it's about guys who forced girls to have sex with them."

"Now I understand."

"It's important to have healthy role models, Rebecca. This small-village guy is not just imitating a stage play icon; he's doing it for real, which is dangerous."

For a brief moment Timothy glanced Rabeka. "It's good to see you after how many years?"

"This is the third year."

"Oh how times flies! For a month I wanted to speak to you Rebecca. I heard that you could not complete your studies because of the strike at the technikon."

"That's true Teacher."

"Now what are your plans?"

"I want to further my studies, if I can get a bursary or a students' loan. On the other hand I'm looking for a job. My father has used the last money of his retrenchment package to send me to the technikon. He's now disappointed; he says I've thrown his money into a rat-hole."

Timothy nodded sympathetically.

"You're still young Rebecca and you have a great future. Your father will be proud of you one day."

"Thank you for believing in me, teacher."

"I have a project for which I want you to lend a helping hand – while you are waiting for a job or a bursary, I want you to help me in the project. I belong to the Guidance Teachers Association in Moletji West area. We have realized that many young people need a lot guidance or inspiration; they make wrong choices because they do not know their purpose in life. To put it differently, they don't have dreams, or they haven't identified their dreams. They don't know where they want to be or their destination. As a result any person can mislead them, or derail their dreams."

TM kept eye-contact with Rabeka for confirmation.

"You're right, Teacher!" Rabeka agreed.

"Girls jump into cars of guys like JR and cars of car-thieves, drug-lords and bank robbers, because they don't know their purpose. Boys are also a target. They are recruited by blue-collar criminals who promise them easy money. Some girls may want guys like JR, and football and music stars to make them pregnant because it is a status symbol or they feel important when they are in the presence of such stars. Now the Association has asked me to start a project that will help young people to dream. To make the project interesting we want to include drama. You are a former student who was very good at acting. So I think you are a suitable person for the job."

"Is it a real job?"

"No! It could be a job perhaps six months later when my bosses realise that it is a worthwhile project. For the moment let's think project-project, and money will follow."

"But I'm not qualified in drama. I don't have a certificate of diploma, Teacher."

"Just call me bra TM!"

TM smiled at Rabeka, his eye glinting with naughtiness. "You're coming up with the 'Moses' excuses."

"What are the 'Moses' excuses.?"

"God said to Moses: 'Go to Pharaoh and tell him: 'Let my people go to the promised land!'" and Moses replied: "I'm not a good speaker, I stammer when I speak!" But God said: 'Moses, you have what it takes, so go and do the job!' And Moses said 'Yess-sah!'"

Rabeka laughed and TM joined her.

TM smiled at Rabeka who smiled back at him.

"A certificate is just a piece of paper," added TM, "Many of the TV stars don't have any certificate or a diploma, but they just love what they are doing and they are excellent! What you must bring is your energy and willingness to learn and to venture into new things. You have talent Rebecca. Acting talent or speaking talent. You are still young and you have a great future. Your mother is going to be proud of you one day!"

"I will be available teacher... excuse me bra TM!"

They laughed.

"In fact I'm excited bra TM! I want to act, sing and dance, and make a big name for myself, and come back to the village to teach girls and young women who have dropped out of school, how to be better people."

TM nodded.

I don't want the girls to aspire to be impregnated by football and music stars and guys like JR!" added Rabeka.

"Excellent my girl! You're the right girl, for the right job at the right time!"

"Maybe I'm too much of a dreamer, bra TM!"

"It's great to dream! If you dream you will fly like an eagle. Without a dream you are nothing but a fat penguin. Rebecca, you are an eagle and you are going to be a role model of girls of Nobody! Your mother is going to be proud of you one day!"

"Thank you bra TM! When are we starting?"

"Next Saturday, at Thuto-ke-kotse Primary School. Thank you for your availability, Rebecca. The workshop will be held from 13h00 to 16h00."

TM dropped Rabeka in front of the gate of her home. Rabeka smiled as she walked towards the house reflecting on aunt Mpule's words of encouragement: *If being a star is what God has given you, then you must do it; you will be successful and you'll have wisdom to pursue and to achieve your dream.* Rabeka also recalled TM words of encouragement: *Your mother is going to be proud of you one day!*

11

'Good afternoon fellow dreamers and achievers!' TM welcomed the eager-faced youth to the first workshop.

There were 24, 14 girls and ten boys,

'Good afternoon sir!' they responded.

They had folded their arms, and stiffened their shoulders, a habit they had acquired over many years as 'well-behaved and orderly' pupils. They were sitting on the chairs arranged in a circle known among the villagers as a 'kraal.' He sat with them with Rabeka on his right. He smiled to each one, starting from his left, ending on his right.

'Welcome to the 'Realise Your Dream' project. My name is Timothy Matlamela, You can call me TM. This is not a classroom situation, so no-one must dare call me teacher Matlamela. When I was born my mother never called me teacher Matlamela.' The group members laughed.

As it was their first meeting, he asked them to introduce themselves, and they did just that. He took a deep breath, paused and scanned them from his right to his left.

'You are too stiff for my liking! Now relax your arms, drop your shoulders and loosen your legs!'

They obliged, with giggles and grins.

TM stated the purpose of the meeting.

'It's great to live in democratic South Africa where the future is indeed bright for all of you, young people.' he paused, scanning them from his right to his left. 'But it's not everyone who's going to make it. It will always happen that there are those who'll succeed and those who fail. In fact there are three groups of people: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who don't know what's happening.'

They laughed and filled the room with a cheerful chatter.

'Listen! Listen!' TM, smacked his palms, and they hushed. 'Now tell three people: "You're going to watch me as I make things happen!"'

Rabeka joined the group and a cheery disorder reigned for the moment as they talked aloud to one another, some pinching, punching, pulling and pushing one another, and laughing aloud.

'Well-done!' shouted TM. 'I'm not yet done with the three groups of people. There are three types of minds.' They listened with utmost concentration. 'There are great minds, average minds and small minds. When he said 'great minds' he stretched his arms sideways. To demonstrate 'average minds' he made a space in which a loaf of bread could fit between his two palms. And when he said 'small minds' he raised his voice to a falsetto while he brought thumb and forefinger close together.

They laughed and he continued. 'Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events and small minds discuss people.' A few chuckles and giggles emerged from a few mouths.

TM paused while they digested what he had just told them. Suddenly a boy called Sethunya stood up and balled up his fists. 'Bra TM, I'm a great mind, I discuss ideas!' The group members chuckled appreciatively.

'What's your idea?' a girl known as Palesa challenged Sethunya.

'I, I... I just want to make things happen!'

The group applauded uproariously.

TM glanced at the paper-back book in his hands. 'As a book collector and a reader, I came across a very interesting book.' He opened the book in the middle and flipped over some pages with his right thumb. 'In big English, it's intriguing!' He lifted up the book and showed them the title: "You Can Achieve Your Dreams." Underneath this was a picture of a wide-eyed young girl looking up to the stars above her. She had worn a school uniform, including a striped blazer and a tie.

TM closed the book. 'It's a wonderful book and it came just in time when I needed material to inspire me,' he paused and flashed a smile. 'to inspire you. It's about how we can achieve our dreams, as you've seen the title. It's for all of you who want to make things happen. It's for great minds who have ideas.' He paused to get feedback thus far. He was satisfied that he was totally in sync with his audience.

'The chapter I'm reading,' continued TM, 'is about what is called affirmations.' He paused, raised his chin and raised his voice. He must have thought he was standing in front of his class. 'What?'

'Affirmations!' they hollered with male and female voices.

'Good! Affirmations are words or statements which you have to say to yourself, in order to be more purposeful. The reason why many girls get pregnant, or want to be in the company of men who own cars and money, is because they have no dreams. Boys aren't perfect. They too have their challenges.'

Again TM paused to give the words he had just spoken to sink into their heads. 'For today I have what is called a group affirmation, which means you are all going to say the statement together. Understood?'

'Yes Bra TM!'

TM turned over some pages of the book and pointed with his forefinger. 'I shall read and when I pause, it's your cue to read after me. Okay let's go for it!'

He read: 'I was put on this earth to make a contribution.'

He paused, they spoke after him and he continued. 'I wasn't created just to consume resources...'

They repeated the words.

'To eat,' he continued, 'breathe and take up space.'

He paused again as they spoke words.

'No!' he said emphatically shaking his head. 'My Creator has made me to make a difference on planet earth!'

They completed the affirmation with deep conviction.

'Excellent!' said TM.

They applauded themselves, exchanged smiles, laughed and began to chat in what soon became a pleasant disorder.

'Listen!' he demanded their full attention, 'You'll have to memorise it and say it twice during our meetings - at the beginning and at the end. In addition you must say it aloud twice at home. Understood?'

'Yes Bra TM!'

'Now go and separate into small groups and help one another to memorise it.' Within a few minutes Palesa strutted towards TM and Rabeka pounding her breast. 'Bra TM! Bra TM! I have memorised it.' The group members came to listen. She did not wait for TM's nod; she rattled on. 'I was put on this earth to make a contribution,' said

ebullient Palesa hurriedly, 'I wasn't created just to consume resources, to eat, breathe and take up space. No! My Creator has made me to make a difference on planet earth!'

TM, Rabeka and the group applauded Palesa.

'Well-done, Palesa!'

Rabeka kissed her on both cheeks.

TM snapped his forefinger and thumb and they looked at him. 'You can also say: 'I'm a great mind, I'm going to make things happen!'

TM paused and flipped over some pages of the book. 'It's good that you want to make things happen. Now something that must drive you is the idea, the dream, of where you are going, of what you want to be. In this book, as we shall share, the writer compares the journey towards achieving your dream with a journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. The main character in the book Joe Ordinary, embraced a big dream, but because he lived in a comfort zone... do you know a comfort zone?'

'No!' they shouted.

'A comfort zone is state of mind which results when you are used to living in the same place, surrounded by familiar people who think like you and perhaps do things the way you do them. And you often feel that this kind of life is 'normal' and that you should continue living it.'

TM paused and a few nods gave him feedback. He was pleased with the progress thus far.

'Now let's continue! Mr Ordinary has decided to go to the Land of Promise. But his first challenge is to leave the Comfort Zone, or Comfortzonia; at last he leaves the zone, but what happens to him? He meets what we call the Bullies of the Border. Which border? you may ask. The border of Comfortzonia. The Bullies of the Border say: 'You can't leave us alone.' or "Who do you think you are?" or "Com'n *chomie*, this is a safe place, it's not safe out there!" If this has happened to you, raise your hand!' TM paused and looked at hands in front of him.

'More than 75 percent?' exclaimed TM. 'You are at the right place, at the right time! Okay, let's continue. Let's say Jane Ordinary defeats or foils the border bullies. And what happens to her? She enters the wasteland where she walks for a long time. And soon she reaches the valley of the giants who want to devour her. They say: "You have nowhere to go! You can't pass here!" Now what's going to happen to Ms Ordinary? She must fight and win the war or be eaten up by the giants. Or she must flee back to Comfortzonia.'

TM paused and glanced at the group from the front to the back. 'Is everything understood?'

'Yes, Bra TM!'

'Interesting?'

'Yes, Bra TM!'

'I'm delighted that you're excited! It is a shame that Joe Ordinary fails to realise his dream of reaching the Promised Land. And what happens when he goes back to Comfortzonia?'

Palesa raised her hand enthusiastically. 'The Border Bullies are going to laugh at him. They will say: 'we told you, you don't have what it takes!'
The group applauded Palesa.

'You are Jane Ordinaries of Nobody, the village where 90-something percent of the girls fall pregnant, and very few of them continue with their education up to at least

Grade 10, and they become labourers and cleaners just like their mothers and aunts, or they are unemployed. But it will never happen to you! You aren't going to be a statistic of bad news!"

They applauded.

'We in the "Realise Your Dream" project,' continued TM, 'will empower you to fight or kill and uhm... out-fox the giants of the valley! Com'n tell three people: "I'm going to kill the giants of the valley and reach my Promised Land!"

Again confusion reigned as they moved around, shouting to one another. Some raised clenched fists, and other hammered their open palms with fists, while others beat their chests.

'But!' said TM vehemently, 'Nobody said it's going to be easy! On your way to your Promised Land there are two things you are certainly going to get: Tears in your red eyes, and dirt under your fingernails.'

TM paused and looked somberly at the group. 'I knew I wouldn't get a "hooray!!!"' They applauded.

'Now let's break away into groups of four, two boys, two girls. You must discuss, you must brain-storm, you must come up with ideas which you as Joe or Jane Ordinary can identify as your big dreams. Also tell us about your Comfortzonias and how you are going to get away from it; tell us who your border bullies are, who your giants of the valley are and how you are going to defeat them in order to reach your Promised Land.'

Bewildered 24 pairs of eyes threw questions at him. 'I know it sounds overwhelming, but it's going to be easier as you make your hands dirtier. Remember this is not a lecture room; it's a workshop where you are going to come up with answers.' Sethunya raised his hand and requested that the items should be repeated. TM asked Rabeka to tell them; she obliged and they jotted them down.

The group members divided themselves into small groups of four as commanded, went out of the room while TM and Rabeka remained.

TM smiled at Rabeka. 'How do you feel about the progress thus far?'

'Excited! I'm ready to make my hands dirtier!'

'Excellent!!'

'How?'

'By doing a skit, as you requested me when you recruited me.'

TM nodded with a smile.

'And the drama will be about,' continued Rabeka, 'the journey from Comfortzonias to the Promised Land. And I want to direct it!'

TM laughed aloud and patted Rabeka's shoulder. 'Go for it Rebecca!'

'Thanks Bra TM! But let me, for a moment, write my dream.'

A hour later the boys and girls strutted into the room, their eyes telling a tale of nothing but desire to be those who wanted to make things happen. Sethunya entered shadow-boxing, and kick-boxing.

'What's happening?' TM inquired from Sethunya.

'I'm fighting with the giants of the valley!'

The group applauded him.

TM pointed to the group with his right index finger. 'Now let Jane or Joe Ordinary tell us about their dreams. Who's first?'

A girl raised her right hand, quickly snapping her fore-finger and her thumb.

TM pointed to the girl. 'Tell us Dipuo!'

'My dream is to be a pilot!'

The members roared with wonder and appreciation, some whistling, a few clapping their hands.

'You' re really a high-flier Dipuo!' commented TM. 'But giants are everywhere... even up there in the clouds!'

They rumbled with laughter.

'Well-done Dipuo,' said TM, flashing a mischievous smile at Dipuo before gesturing towards the boys, 'And are they your giants?'

'Yes, boys and HIV/Aids are my giants!'

'No-no-no!!' shouted a boy, ' we are your fellow travellers. Sugar-daddies such as JR are your giants!'

They applauded uproariously.

'Now let's give Rebecca a chance to tell us about her dream.'

Rabeka responded with a shyness which faded into a smile. TM had taken her by surprise.

'Okay! My dream is to be a great actress like um... Whoopi Goldberg!' said Rabeka her voice getting more confident as she spoke.

The group applauded.

Rabeka raised her hand, in the process interrupting the applause. 'Let me add that I want to be a complete performer,' she paused to get feedback and she was certain they would appreciate if she could explain what she meant by "complete performer." So she continued: 'My dream is to study and to complete a degree or a diploma in performing arts in America. I want to major in acting, singing and dancing. That's what I mean by being a complete performer.'

They applauded again.

'But," added Rabeka. 'I'm not going to be selfish when I'm rich and famous. I'm going back to the village to build a sort of a training centre for girls and young women who have dropped out of school, and teach them how to be better people, instead of just hoping that a man will come and save them; I don't want the girls to live purposeless lives.'

They applauded and Rabeka nodded.

'Now who could be her border bullies?' asked TM.

'Her parents and some relatives,' said a girl called Ntswaki.

'Well-done Ntswaki. Fellow dreamers,' said TM after a brief pause, 'we are interested in your ideas, but we won't have time to discuss all of them today. What's important is how you can apply what you're learning here to your situation. Agreed?'

'Yes, bra TM!'

TM craned his smiling face towards Rabeka. 'Tell them what we've decided to do.'

Rabeka raised her head, asserting confidence. 'We thought it would be interesting to turn the workshop into a short stage play.'

The group applauded.

'Do you like the idea?' asked TM.

'Yes!!' responded the group.

'Now which idea can we turn into a play?'

Some of them shouted 'Pilot! pilot!' while others countered 'Performing artist! Performing

where they must picture themselves receiving a standing ovation from the officials.

On Friday TM and Rabeka agreed that on Saturday they should meet at the venue at 09h00, two hours before the play performed. TM had arrived at the place as early as 08h30, and made certain that things would go according to plan as he expected Rabeka to arrive any minutes after 09h00. TM had asked for a donation of some refreshments for the guests from the local supermarket. So when the buns, loaves of breads, cheese and other things were delivered the boys and girls started to prepare the sandwiches. At 09h30 TM became anxious when he did not see Rabeka. He sent her an SMS, and she did not respond. He called her and his message went to her voice-mail.

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At 10h00 TM asked Sethunya to direct the rehearsals, while his left hand was hard-pressed on his ear as he was engaged in several cell-phone calls.

'Bra TM,' said Sethunya, 'what are we going to do about the part performed by Rabeka?'

TM's cell-phone rang and he answered the call, giving someone the directions of how to get to the venue. 'I'll make a plan,' said TM his finger already dialing.

When the performance started, the audience comprised about 20 people, including five officials from the Department of Education and five members of the Guidance Teachers' Association.

'We're going to present to you a fifteen-minute snippet, of our production in progress, 'The Dream Girl,' announced TM, 'I have given you a summary about the theme and the story-line of the play. Owing to circumstance beyond our control the leading actress could not come, and we do not have an under study. Because I've decided that the show must go on, I'm going to read the main character's lines. So please bear with us.'

When the moment came for TM to read Rabeka's lines, he surprisingly threw away the script and acted the part, speaking in a young woman's pitch. The audience found that entertaining, and the audience applauded loudly, as TM and the cast made a bow.

After the refreshments, the cast members left immediately while TM remained; he had two quick discussions with the members of the Guidance Teachers' Association and with the officials of the Education Department.

As TM drove away from the locked gate, he saw Rabeka approaching. He stopped next to her. 'Please hop in,' said TM.

She walked to the passenger's seat after hesitating for a moment. She got into the car and he drove away, his eyes not on the steering wheel but on her.

'What happened?' asked TM.

Rabeka heaved a heavy sigh. 'My parents.'

'They don't want you to work with me? Why?'

'My mother had been watching me since I had awoken. At 08h00 she entered my hut and told me that she and my father would like to speak to me. I could see that something was amiss. After they had entered my room my father said to me: "Mpekana we told you several times that you should no more attend that drama things with teacher

Matlamela." When I asked them "why?" my mother said they can't allow me to keep wasting time on doing a thing that doesn't bring any income when girls and boys of my age had completed their studies and were making progress in life and were helping their parents.

'My father took my cell-phone; he's by nature a very sweet person. But I was shocked when he said to me: "Bring me that cell-phone here, because we don't want you to speak to anyone and we don't want anyone to speak to you.'"

'And he took it?'

'Yes. He's always a gentleman but that day he was a different animal. His eyes were red and his voice hoarse. Something had got into his head, and that something comes from my mother; and that something that got into my mother's head comes from Sekiele's sister. I didn't want to tell you bra TM. For two weeks my parents have been putting me under pressure to quit working with you. Last week they told me I mustn't come to the rehearsals because I'm not being paid, but I told them there was no way I could miss them. So today they decided they would stop me to attend, and they knew my absence would be crippling to the performance, and this is what happened.

'Don't tell me what I hate to hear, Rebecca!' said TM. 'Do you mean I'm going to lose such a useful person?'

For a moment she was tongue-tied.

TM heaved a sigh and raised his head. 'I think I must speak to your parents. Let me speak to your mother!'

'Oh, No bra TM! It will make things worse, my mother won't even listen to you.'

'Why?'

'You know about how they wanted to marry me off to Sekiele. ... So this will confirm a suspicion that you are my boyfriend... *Eish*, I can't tell you...'

'You are going to tell me Rebecca!'

TM indicated, swung the steering wheel and took the car out of the pot-holed bumpy dirt-road and parked the car under the shade of a morula tree. Rabeka paused, took out a tissue paper and wiped a tear lurking at the corner of her left eye.

'Bra TM, Rumours are also doing rounds in the village that you are my boyfriend. Even now as you are with me now people are watching and all they see are a boyfriend and girl-friend.'

'Does that bother you?'

'No!'

'What bothers me,' said TM, 'is that you are parting with me at a wrong time when things are about to happen.'

TM gazed pitifully at dewy-eyed Rabeka. 'So what are you going to do? Sit at home, doing chores from sunrise to sundown?'

'They say I must go to the city and look for a job.'

'Go away? Go to the city? Where will you stay?' asked sorely disappointed TM.

'They say I must go to Pretoria. I'll stay with my aunt in Mamelodi.'

'You mean you can't stay another month, trying to look for a job as a private teacher not far from here?'

'No! There's just too much pressure, bra TM. I must go to Pretoria. My father keeps reminding me that I have used all his retrenchment package money for the technikon which has now closed because of the student's unrest.'

'I understand, Rebeccca. The fire burns the one closest to it.'

Rabeka sobbed, wiped her tears and blew her nose. 'I will go there but I'm not going to look for a job. But I'm going to look for a drama group, or auditions.'

Saddened TM looked at her for a while.

Rabeka, forced a smile 'I'm a great mind, bra TM. And I'm going to make things happen in Pretoria!'

'Go for it Rebecca! I believe in you, for you have the potential go be a great artist!' He patted her shoulder. 'Your mother is going to be proud of you one day!'

'Thank you bra TM!' said tearful Rabeka.

When she inquired about the event, TM told her all what happened. He added that the show was well-received by those who attended, and that officials from the department said they would see how they would recommend to their bosses that the production be sponsored. Rabeka was pleased to hear of the progress.

A day before Rabeka left for Pretoria, TM had invited the group members to a little farewell party.

'Rebecca has decided to get out of Comfortzonia,' said TM sombrely, feeling a tad uncomfortable that he was lying to listeners who were perhaps as up to date as him, 'in the journey towards her Promised Land.' he paused, coughed and scanned the sad-looking people in front of him, 'And I have no doubt that the workshops and the play have prepared her to face the giants of the valley.'

TM had had an opportunity to mourn Rabeka's imminent departure; so now he gave the group members a moment to mourn too. As they spoke of how she had made impacts in their lives, Rabeka began to shed some tears. She felt as if she were attending her own memorial service, with a coffin standing in the church in front of the congregation, and her obituary being read.

Part Two

1 In Mamelodi Rabeka lived with her aunt, who had sucked her granny's breast after her mother.

'You look slimmer,' Rabeka paid a compliment to her buxom cousin, Thabang, as she gave her bear-hug.

Thabang chuckled deliciously. 'Thanks RB,' That was how Thabang had addressed Rabeka. 'I had to lose some kilos. "Lose weight or you lose the job!" Missus van Staden, our boss once told me. She said I must be a good example as I am working for a beauty parlour.'

Rabeka smiled at Thabang who was three years older than her.

'RB, do you remember, those days,' said Thabang as she helped to take Rabeka's luggage to a backroom. 'when other kids used to call me "Fatty boom-boom?"' They both laughed aloud.

'Yes!' agreed Rabeka.

As they had tea, Rabeka poured her heart to her cousin about her challenges that landed her in that part of the world: how her parents were upset that she had rebuffed Sekiele's desire to have her as a wife, and rumours that had thrived in the village that she was in love with TM, and how her parents had finally decided that she must go to Pretoria to look for a job.

'But I like what my parents have done to me,' said Rabeka.

Thabang gave Rabeka a puzzled look. 'RB, how can you say that?'

'They forced me out of the comfort zone.'

Rabeka shared with Thabang what she had learned from TM's 'Realise Your Dream' project. Thabang was impressed with her 'intelligent' cousin.

Thabang's mother - whom Rabeka addressed as aunt Lobisa- arrived as the girls were preparing supper; she was pleased to see her sister's child. After enquiring about her relatives in the village, she went to the lounge where she watched TV, until supper was served.

The same evening TM called, inquiring if Rabeka had travelled safely and if everything was okay.

'Now that you're in the city,' said TM, 'you can go the library and read something about acting and directing.'

'It's a wonderful suggestion, thanks bra TM.'

'One-eyed woman was a queen in the land of the blind.'

They laughed.

'Yes, I got to improve my acting skills, bra TM. Competition is high!'

'Yes. Another thing, Rebecca. You must hang around like-minded people, people who can inspire you.'

'You're right bra TM.'

'Remember: if you associate with eagles you'll soon learn how to fly high! But if

you live with chickens you'll keep pecking at the soil.'

'I like the way you put it. Thanks for the advice, bra TM.'

The next morning Rabeka went to the city by train with Thabang, whose place of employment was in the city-centre. When they left Thabang's mother thought that Rabeka was going to look for a job, as she, Rabeka, had told her about her parent's pressure to get herself a job. Rabeka asked Thabang to show her where the library was.

'Who are the eagles of theatre?' Rabeka asked some girls at the Es'kia Mphahlele Library.

After consulting one another they told her they would find out for her. After spending about a month reading about acting and directing, at the library, and consulting librarians, Rabeka had learnt about local theatre icons such as Junior Makhura, Gooshkah Baloi, and Mawaza Mthimunya. She also heard that these shining stars of theatre had burgeoning drama companies in the city centre.

Rabeka decided that some days she would visit the library, and during other days she would look for the rehearsal places and offices of the theatre directors; she earnestly hoped to empower herself theatrically and even better, to get an acting part in a theatre production. Soon the desire to make a break into a theatre company became equal to her thirst for acting skills. *What would be the point of acquiring knowledge if I cannot apply it?* she thought.

Wearing a pair of denims and tackies she hopped across the city and located theatre places. Once she had located a particular building Rabeka waited in the street next to food vendors. The moment the performers passed in the street she greeted them and introduced herself to the girls with more friendly faces, charming them with a well-rehearsed smile.

Introducing herself as Reeba, she befriended several girls from the theatre companies, and they soon invited her to visit their groups. Over two weeks, she visited these drama centres. Whenever she went to the city she lied to her aunt that she was attending job interviews. She would even show her aunt copies of CVs she was supposed to give her prospective employers. She had agreed with her cousin, not to breathe a word to her aunt what she was actually doing in the city.

2

Whenever Rabeka's people phoned, her aunt, she told them how Rabeka was travelling to the city every morning in search of jobs.

By the end of the month Rabeka had visited three theatre companies. At the beginning of a new month Rabeka visited Junior Makhura's company, as if her nose could smell that something good would happen: Junior himself asked her to audition for the part of a girl who had not attended rehearsals for a week owing to illness. Junior was beginning to panic because he was left with only two weeks before the group would perform 'Take it or leave it' - a Sotho-English drama - during the annual Windybrow Arts Festival, in Hillbrow, Johannesburg; there new and untested productions and performers would be show-cased, and be 'discovered' by the media.

In his mid-forties, stockily built Junior sported a dreadlocked rasta hair-style, that had grown to rest on his shoulders. His light-complexion was slightly sun-burnt and his trimmed beard and moustache; the beard stretched to his temples. Rumour circulated that although he was not known to be a married man officially, he was a serial 'vat-en-sit' relationships guy with several women and girls in Mamelodi. He was fond of wearing pair of denim trousers, and denim jackets and shirts - in summer and in winter. When it was very cold he would add a bluish sleeveless jersey.

Junior gave Rabeka fifteen minutes to read the script; it was just a few sentences. She was portraying the part of shebeen queen who was sorting out a lovelorn married woman who had tracked her husband to the shebeen.

Within ten minutes Rabeka had memorised the lines; for the last five minutes she rehearsed the part. The clock ticked towards the decisive moment, and Rabeka was called to demonstrate her interpretation of character and her acting ability before Junior and fifteen performers. Rabeka was slightly nervous, but she harnessed what was negative for her own success. She was 'in character' when she entered: her eyes were menacing, her forehead slightly contorted, and her lips firmly pressed together.

Facing an imaginary woman, she heaved a sigh, flexed her right bicep, pointed a threatening index finger, and pouted:

'Hei wena mosadinyana ke wena! (Hey you damn woman!). How dare you come to my house chasing after your husband? Do you know me? I'm bitch-never-die! A clevah of Lady Selbourne! You must feed your dog or tie it! If your dog comes to my house he has found a delicious meaty bone. When your husband is having a good time here he's my customer, and I will always protect my customers. So no disturbance please! Out of my house! A bo re hwaa! (Get lost!).'

A roar of applause followed Rabeka's performance. They had all expressed their feelings in action: that Rabeka had brilliantly interpreted the character and had performed the role with great aplomb and lots of oomph. The young performers were so overwhelmed with emotion that they hugged and kissed Rabeka on her cheeks.

When they had all sat down Junior focused on Rabeka. It was clear that she wanted to say something. 'Reeb, have you any experience in singing? I want boys and girls who can act and sing.'

'Yes, I've always sang in my church. I've always formed quartets at home and even at the technikon. I was a member of the Students' Christian Fellowship Choir.'

'Okay sing for us!' commanded Junior.

Rabeka responded by standing up, stretching her shoulders, inhaling and filling her lungs with air, and opening her mouth. She sang her favourite gospel song: *What a mighty God we serve*.

They applauded, nodded and raised their thumbs, as she walked to her chair.

'You got the job, baby!' Junior told Rabeka.

'Thanks bra Junior!' said elated Rabeka.

'Welcome to the club,' said Junior who gave Rabeka a bear-hug, and so did the whole cast.

'Now let me tell you about my style of directing,' Junior spoke, fixing his gaze on Rabeka. 'I'm comfortable with what critics regard as 'Township Melodrama'; this was started and popularised by Gibson Kente. Do you this great man of theatre?'

'No!' said Rabeka

'Gibson Kente is the 'Father of Township Theatre' who wrote and produced many musicals between the 1960s and 1980s; he used cliché characters, manner of acting and songs. The usual characters were gangsters, policemen, shebeen queens, sangomas, saints, priests, pranksters and prudes.' Junior paused. 'I'm not ashamed that I like the 'Kente Theatre' tradition because it's very commercial; it sells; Mbongeni Ngema has made a mark by impressing Broadway in the US, with township theatre. Reeba, are you comfortable with what I'm saying?'

'I have no problem bra Junior, I'm prepared to learn.'

Junior asked her to observe how the cast performed for the rest of the day. At 16h00, when the group dispersed Junior Rabeka gave her the script to go and study it at home.

The same day Rabeka, met Patience Mahuleka, a girl he had befriended when he last visited Gooshkah Baloi's group.

'Reeba, it's good that we are meeting,' said Patience.

'What's up?' asked Rabeka.

'Good news! Our group is preparing for the Windybrow Arts Festival. Bra Gooshkah said I should tell you that he can give you a part, in our company.'

'He's too late for tears!'

'Have you got a job somewhere? Who gave you the job? Junior?'

'You guessed right!'

'Joo-nnah! bra Gooshkah is going to be very disappointed that he lost you.'

'Why? There are many talented girls in Mamelodi.'

'Bra Gooshkah heard from grapevine that you were the director of 'The Dream Girl' in Limpopo, and he wanted to beat Junior by grabbing you first. He felt he can't let such a treasure slip through his fingers. He was sure that with you he would beat Junior this year; Junior's group won the floating trophy last year.'

'Why all this rivalry?'

'Bra Gooshkah had old scores to settle: eight years ago when he was a leading member of Junior's group, Junior did not pay them during one arts festival, and he had used the money belonging to them to buy furniture and a bakkie for his family. Gooshkah is also blaming Junior for luring one of his boys out of his company. You know, as a former member of Junior's company, Bra Gooshkah is always eager to prove to his former boss that he can excel, or beat him.'

Rabeka shrugged her shoulders.

Not all the cast members were happy that Rabeka was part of the group. Some girls like Bathini felt threatened. Until Rabeka's audition Bathini was one of the top three performers of the group – she could sing and act better than all the girls and most boys. Rabeka got a clear message from Bathini's face – that Bathini did not like her. Bathini had started with Junior ten years ago when she was ten. So Junior had a long working relationship with her; in addition to acting she was entrusted with duties such as wardrobe and make-up. She was also an unofficial assistant director.

One day Junior asked Rabeka to act as assistant director as he was going to see some possible sponsors in the city. Bathini was unhappy that Rabeka had been given the much-coveted duty instead of her; she felt the 'job' had belonged to her. That part of the afternoon during rehearsals Rabeka tried her best directorial skills in order to maintain the standard raised by Junior. All the performers cooperated with her.

An hour later Rabeka tried to give Bathini a tip, and Bathini would not listen. Rabeka made an effort to be tactful. 'Bathini, I suggest that you should...' Bathini, her arms on her waist, faced Rabeka defiantly. She was the tallest girl, who was endowed with a well-built body and a strong pair of legs. Her dark-complexioned face scowled at her target. 'You can't teach me how to act,' she rudely interrupted Rabeka. 'I'm at a higher level than you. You must look at me carefully, girl! I'm a girl of Flaka; what can a girl from the rural Limpopo teach me?'

For a moment it was clear that Bathini had won round 1. But Rabeka stepped closer to Bathini. 'Okay clever girl of Flaka, Junior had all the confidence in the girl from rural Limpopo! So you got to listen to me because Junior's powers have been delegated to me!'

'Rabeka is right!' shouted Tonkana.

'Yes!! Yess!!' agreed the rest of the group.

'Yes, if Bra Junior has delegated power to Reeb we must all listen!' added Palesa.

Bathini flexed her shoulder and stamped her size fifteen foot. 'But the job will always belong to me because...'

Rabeka took another step towards Bathini waving her right index finger. 'You shutt-up Bathini!'

So incensed was Rabeka that she balled her fingers, ready to throw a powerful punch on Bathini's eye. Rabeka had shocked everybody including herself. She had wondered what had happened to her rural values of respect, tact, kindness, readiness and willing to listen to someone even when she did not agree with her.

At that moment Junior entered the rehearsal room. All heaved a great sight of relief.

'Why this hens' fight?' demanded Junior.

They told him all what had happened. Junior verbally chastised Bathini for disobedience. Bathini walked out of the room crying. She waited outside until it was time to go home. She returned and surprised Junior by knocking at his office door and entering before he could say: 'Come!' He thought she had long gone home.

'Bra Junior, I've been suffering with you, going up and down for so many years! Today why are you against me?'

Junior gave her a wry smile and she stepped out of his office fuming.

3

After many sunrises and sunsets, the great day of the Windybrow Arts Festival, at last dawned, matured into a hot day that lost the sting and disappeared behind the skyscrapers of Johannesburg. The groups were performing in the evenings, starting on Monday.

That the festival's PR people had done an excellent job was indicated by throngs of audiences entering the main entrance, buying tickets and putting bums on the seats in the three theatres. That Wednesday, Junior's boys and girls who an hour earlier had been ingling with fellow performers from many parts of Gauteng province, waiting for the behind the curtain facing the audience, awaiting the final gong. Rabeka and Bathini had ignored each other socially. Bathini cooperated with Rabeka regarding the wardrobe, though at times she felt like 'forgetting' her costumes. For make-up Bathini asked Palesa to make up Rabeka; she was loath to touch 'the enemy's' cheek.

Photo-journalists were ready for their task. Rabeka was nervous but as usual she was certain that what was negative would be used for her benefit. She had sent a 'Please pray for me' SMS to aunt Mpule. Her mentor TM had sent her an SMS: *The members of 'The Dream Girl' know you will make them proud - the sky is your limit! Soar eagle, soar!!*

Seconds before she ascended to the stage she had recalled aunt Mpule's words of encouragement: *If being a star is what God has given you, then you must do it until you achieve your dream.* And TM's words: *Your mother is going to be proud of you one day!*

The 'Take it or leave it' troupe was the second to last group to perform that evening. As the final minute came and crawled away, the cast began to dish out to the audience what they had paid for. Rabeka as the shebeen queen wore an old pair of slacks, slippers and a *motoichi* apron; her face was made up for a woman in her early forties, and she wore a black woman's wig topped with a slanting beret.

For the next forty-five minutes the performers just mesmerized their captive audience who applauded and whistled and shouted in full throttle; the camera flashlights were the busiest, especially when Rabeka made her impressive performance which elicited raucous laughter. She had executed her talent true to the group's motto: *I came, I performed, I conquered!* – a slogan adapted from what Junior believed to be Napoleon Bonaparte's military mantra: *I came, I saw, I conquered!*

After the show, it was evident who the star of the night and the week thus far was: Rabeka. She was hounded by arts journalists and photographers of regional and local newspapers, including the Mamelodi Sun.

One national newspaper, City Press, covered the festival. Hawk-eyed Junior was weary of theatre directors and producers eyeing Rabeka. Protectively holding Rabeka by her arms, he told some of them straight: 'Groom your local talent! Don't just come here and pluck the fruit I have sweated for!' Junior and Rabeka posed for many pictures. The organizers of the festival tipped Junior that his group would be short-listed.

On Friday Junior went with the whole group to get the results of their performance. He had expected to win hands down - he had been tipped by a 'reliable source.' Six groups out of 24 were short-listed. The evening started at 17h00 with wine, cheese and snacks served in the foyer of the main theatre. Under Junior's watchful eye, Rabeka was always crowded by fellow performers from other groups, including Patience.

At 18h00 everybody was seated, and the air was filled with tension and suspense among the contestants whose win or loss would be witnessed by the media and the invited theatre icons and theatre lovers.

At last the announcer, the PRO, Otto Moloto, stood and started announcing then results from the sixth to the first. All bated their breath, wishing that they should be announced as the winning group. On the edges of their seats, Junior and the top performers sitting close to him, heaved a sigh of relief when position two went to a group in East Rand.

It was obvious to all who the winners would be. Junior's boys and girls were restive with excitement, as Otto stood with a smile directed at Junior. Upset Gooshkah whose group took position three, caused a stir when he lead his group, walking out of the main theatre's back exit, chanting: *We wuzz robbed! We wuzz robbed!* The security staff on duty quieted them, warned them, hurried them out and escorted them to their combi.

Otto had two pieces of paper in his hands, as he had to announce both the best group and the best performer.

'The best performer of the festival is....' He held his audience in suspense, then immediately raised his tone '...Reebs Maru-a-pula!'

Rabeka jumped upwards, overtaken by sheer excitement. She turned to her right and her left and even bowed, acknowledging the audience who unleashed an ear-shattering applause. She looked pretty, wearing make-up that made her coffee-coloured skin glow; she had plaited her hair in a design shaped like a basotho *modia-myea* hat; the extension of her hair on top of her head, tilted towards the neck, was shaped like an inverted pyramid. Her cousin Thabang had made an effort to beautify her for her moment of glory. Her youngest aunt, a dress-maker, had sewn her a very chic dress out of a distinctly West African print.

'Ooh!!' shouted the cast members who leapt upwards, their arms outstretched. They lifted Rabeka's arms and patted her shoulders.

Otto gestured towards the excited cast members in an attempt to hush them. There was dead silence.

'And the best group is....' He raised his voice, 'Junior Makhura's "Take it or leave it!"'

Junior with Rabeka at his right hand and the rest of the cast jumped up, waving their palms triumphantly, as a thunderous applause filled the main theatre.

In the style of the black trade unions, the members lifted up and carried Junior and Rabeka, dancing and singing around the foyer and the parking space. Bathini was far from happy seeing Rabeka being lionized in that manner. The only moment which pleased her jealous heart was when she had grabbed a floating trophy from another girl's hand and lifted it up and sang. Junior knew that in Rabeka he had hit a jack-pot, while Bathini knew she had found the source of her wretchedness.

4

The media people waited patiently as the group celebrated. Fifteen minutes later as camera flash-bulbs winked and coughed light, the cast smiled raising their clenched fists, chanting in unison: *We came, We performed, We conquered!* Video cameras were aplenty, doing the work they had been created to do. Junior and Rabeka posed together, and at one moment when their heads met, Bathini hated what she was seeing. Junior and Rabeka also posed separately and were captured by gadgets which ate a lot of celluloid. Minutes before Gooshkah's group left for Pretoria, he told his group members not to go near to Junior's groups and added that Junior had bribed the judges.

Two arts journalists interviewed Junior and Rabeka together and separately for about an hour, while the group never tired of celebrating. Other journalists who were satisfied with the information they had received from the PRO, asked their photographers to take pictures, and left. The journalists asked Rabeka a question she had expected:

'What is your dream?'

'My dream is to study and to complete a degree or a diploma in performing arts in America. I want to specialise in acting, singing and dancing. I want to be a complete performer.'

"Why particularly in the US?"

"Because I'll be closer to Hollywood!"

Just before the members of 'Take it or leave it!' got into two kombis Junior announced that a 'Well-done!' party would be held on Sunday in the afternoon. 'Tomorrow on Saturday,' added Junior, 'I want you to have a good rest.'

On Sunday morning as Rabeka strolled to Junior's place she passed at a corner where newspapers were sold and bought a copy of City Press. She walked as she browsed but she stopped suddenly when she flipped to the culture and entertainment supplement. She held her breath, her eyes scanning the page until they landed on her pictures and the pictures of Junior and the cast, splashed across the double middle page of the supplement. A caption under her photo in which she radiated a ravishing smile was: *Talented Reeb's Maru-a-pula...from obscurity to glory - a star is born.* The article also said that the drama was: '*An entertaining and enthralling performance,*' and '*A tour de force performance.*'

As she trotted further, her cell-phone started ringing with well-wishers wanting to speak to 'a star'. From Limpopo TM called: 'How does it feel to wake up from obscurity to glory?'

Rabeka could hear voices in the background that she presumed were those of the members of 'The Dream Girl.'

'Bra TM, can I hire you as my PA?' said Rabeka quivering with a good laugh. TM laughed with her.

'I told you that we knew you'd make us proud,' said TM, his voice tinged with nothing but pride.

As Rabeka entered the gate of Junior's house, she could hear party music blaring from the hi-fi's stereophonic speakers. Other cast members of 'Take it or leave it' who had arrived earlier were in a marquee pitched on the lawn; some sat on the chairs around four extended tables; these tables were covered by table clothes loaned by some

girls' parents. The elated cast members never sat down but began to gyrate as they snapped their fingers, to the 'grumbling' bass background on the hi-fi. The appetising smell of braai wafted all over the yard. Junior's boys and girls hugged and smacked each other's palms, punctuating with the mantra of achievement: *We came, We performed, We conquered!*

'Listen my boys and girls,' said Junior an hour later as he scooped jelly and custard, 'I've made you famous and I want you to be loyal to me. On Wednesday, just after we performed, some owl-eyed theatre directors and producers wanted to poach Reebbs and I told them *phaa!* "Groom your local talent! Don't just come here and pluck the fruit I have sweated for!" Is that not so, Reebbs?'

'It's true bra Junior!'

'So please be loyal to me. The producers will desire to steal you,' he smiled, 'Yes, steal you! In soccer they buy the stars but in theatre they steal. You make, they just take!'

Junior paused, and the sound of dessert spoons scraping the bottoms of the little bowls could be heard.

Junior's eye glinted mischievously. 'God gives and another satan just grabs and goes!' They roared with laughter.

Junior raised his right fore-finger. 'And if anyone of you has a problem that'll make it difficult for her to continue working with us, let him or her tell me now. Most of the time, it's the girls who are faced with some problems. Some of you have jealous boyfriends who will try to stop you from attending the rehearsals and the performances.'

Rabeka jerked her shoulder, indicating readiness to speak. 'And some have difficult parents.'

'Reebbs is right!' agreed Junior, 'Last year there was a girl who wanted to join our group. She had a promising talent. But after I had auditioned her she pleaded with me: "Bra Junior, please talk to my mother; she doesn't want me to be an actress. She says artists are useless people who take drugs and commit suicide." So I told her: "Please sort out your family affairs before you can join us." I also asked her to bring a letter from her mother.'

'I never saw her again. Two months later when I was about to pay for my groceries at Shoprite, a cashier serving me gave me an ear-to-ear smile, and I said "Have I seen your face somewhere?"'

'She replied "*Hau* bra Junior, have you forgotten me? I am Ntlogeleng, the one who came to your group and asked you to speak to my mother." I said: "Now I remember!" She said she had to look for an eight to four kind of a job because her mother who is a single parent said she must get a decent job because she has passed grade 12 and that she must contribute money for the upkeep of the family. Ntlogeleng said: "Can I come to your group when I'm off-duty?" and I said: "I don't take part-timers! I want those who want to make a career out of acting and singing."'

Some members began to clear the table while other brought juices and some glasses.

Mathopa raised his hand. 'But it's not only the girls who have problems. Some of us, boys have fathers who say: "I cannot feed a bullock who just grazes and contributes nothing!" Such fathers and mothers cannot understand that it takes time to develop a career in performing arts. Even now my mother asked if I was paid for the festival, and I

told her bra Junior did not receive funding and that we hoped to get exposure that would make it easy for us to be paid in future."

'Yes Mathopa is right!' said another boy, Tonkana. 'Another problem facing us boys, is girls!'

The group members laughed aloud.

'Let me explain: our girl friends expect us to give them money. What money? Where must I get the money? During the festival we only received money for food. So we find ourselves losing our girl-friends to the boys who can give them ...'

'Sugar-daddies are seducing our girls with...' said Mathopa.

'But there are also sugar-mommies who...' Mmapula interrupted Mathopa.

'*Ho-ho-ho!*' Junior interrupted Mmapula, 'We aren't here to talk about your emotional problems. If you want to be successful in life or a career and especially in this industry you got to be focused; you have to prioritise. Don't waste time trying to impress boys and girls. Get your career first, boys and girls later!'

They applauded.

A smile on Junior's face disappeared gradually and seriousness spread across his face. 'I want to say for the last time: I've made you famous and none is going to leave me and join another group. If anyone is going to leave I know what I'm going to do, and that's no empty threat!'

Silence mixed with tension filled the room. It was the first time that Junior said the words *...and this is no empty threat!* No-one had an idea about what he meant by that. And none dared to ask. Rabeka wondered if the warning was directed at her, as she was the performer who had received most kudos in the group for the performance during the festival. She felt like assuring him that it would not be her who would quit the group. She also thought she should tell Junior that her parents were not keen that she should pursue the performing arts. She thought: *My face has appeared in City Press. Soon my parents will know that I haven't looked for a job but I'm doing what they said I shouldn't do.*

Satisfied that his warning was well noted, a smile gradually replaced Junior's serious look. 'Let me close on a positive note. If you work hard in this production,' added Junior, 'money will follow us. Festival organizers and theatres will look for you. But don't be in hurry. I'm still developing you. Other people will promise you heaven and paradise; but they'll use you and dump you! So please be loyal to the production. Next year if I get funding I'll take you to the Grahamstown Arts Festival, and who knows someone from overseas might notice us and take us there?'

They applauded again.

Rabeka thought about the 'Realise Your Dream Project,' back home in Limpopo. A project she was forced to quit because of pressure from her family. She thought of the affirmations, the border bullies, the giants of the valley and the Promised Land. She felt she should have shared these wonderful ideas, but she also felt there was no time as the group was preparing for the Windybrow Arts Festival. She decided that she would share the information when they resume the rehearsals within a week.

As the group members left and walked out of the gate carrying leftover snacks, meat, cool-drinks and juices, Rabeka tapped Junior's shoulder. At the moment Bathini saw Junior turning with a smile towards Rabeka.

5

Bathini's face was crisscrossed with anger and resentment. 'Look at Reebbs,' Bathini scornfully told three girls she was walking with, 'she wants to open her thighs to bra Junior. When a rural girl comes to the city she doesn't play! She knows that the way to success is through the director's bedroom!' The girls giggled. Two of them knew they had been laid by Junior; the third one did not know she was on Junior's 'hit-list'. According to hearsay, she was nursing a fantasy to sleep with Junior, who had treated her like a relative, because he had grown up with her mother. He had attended the same church as her mother until he adopted the 'rasta religion' five years ago. Junior led Rabeka by her hand and made her sit on a chair opposite him. He did not want to speak to her standing.

'What can I do for Celeb Reebbs?' asked Junior, evoking loud peals of laughter from Rabeka.

'Bra Junior....'

She became tongue-tied. She didn't have guts to bare her heart to him. She was now reluctant to tell what her subconscious mind had rehearsed during the last fifteen to twenty minutes. *Bra Junior, I have difficult parents; they don't want me to follow acting and singing as a career. I lied to my aunt that I was looking for a 'proper job' and not acting. Even during the evening of our performance I told her that I was attending a course as a sales rep trainee. Now she knows I was lying, and she's not going to talk nicely to me.*

And back at home my parents aren't going to rejoice when they see my pictures in City Press. They want me to get what they regard as a proper job where I will earn a monthly salary. But bra Junior, I'm not going to work at a supermarket like Ntlogeleng, for the sake of pleasing anyone.'

Being the excellent performer that she was, she improvised. 'Bra Junior, can I ask you? Have I said anything that I shouldn't have said? Um... Are you satisfied with everything that I've mentioned to the journalists?'

Junior took a copy of City Press and scanned it with the help of his fore-finger, searching for something. At last his finger pointed. He smiled at her. 'I think you shouldn't have mentioned that you don't have a boyfriend. If I were you I should have mentioned that I've a ravishing Romeo.'

'Why should I say so?'

'For your own protection. If the wolves know that the hare is under the lion's watchful eye they won't bother her.'

'Don't worry bra Junior. I'm my own lion,' said Rabeka, inviting a loud laughter from Junior. She laughed with him.

Junior walked her to the gate where he bade her a goodbye that included a bear-hug. When she was in the main street she waved down a local taxi. A few minutes later as she walked to her aunt's place she thought she had done a good thing by not telling Junior about her parents' opposition to her career as a performing artist.

In the village the learned people who had acquired a habit of reading newspapers bought the Sunday newspapers at the local cafe. A cousin of Sekiele who had lived a few houses away, bought City Press. And she saw the picture in the newspaper and read the story about Rabeka; after reading with bated breath, she showed the paper to Sekiele's sister Mathilda. Delighted to read that Rabeka had mentioned that she had no boyfriend, words of encouragement welled up in her as she walked to Sekiele's room.

She handed him the newspaper. 'Seki,' she said affectionately, after Sekiele had read the paper, 'the girl is still available.'

When she sensed that Sekiele was not getting excited about what he had just read, she had to add something. 'The hawk has not yet snatched the chick. Don't you agree with me?'

Sekiele nodded.

Mathilda smiled. 'If she tells the whole world that she has no boyfriend, it means she wants you to know about it.'

Sekiele thought over her enthusiastic sister's words.

She did not hesitate to hammer her point. 'Seki, just pray and hope, and believe that she'll at last be the daughter-in-law of our family. I'll pray and fast with you.'

'Thank you sis Thili,' said Sekiele, who glanced again at the newspaper article.

Mathilda was delighted that her brother was agreeing with her. Busybody Mathilda did not waste time in sharing the news. She was within minutes standing on her two feet, going to Rabeka's homestead.

Shaking her head Mma-Rabeka read the newspaper silently; her moving lips soon emitted hissing whispers. She paused, focussed on Rabeka's picture and handed the newspaper to Mathilda who quickly realised that Rabeka's mother had missed something in the article.

'I know that you don't like Rabeka to do acting,' said Mathilda, 'But one good thing is that she says she has no boy-friend. Don't you think this gives hope that...'

'The only hope is to do a real job. If she's doing acting she'll meet men who like what she's doing.'

Suddenly Mma-Rabeka lowered her head and smacked her palms as was the habit of the villagers when they expressed amazement. 'So I have been made to suck a thumb?'

'What do you mean?' inquired Mathilda.

'They told black-black lies to me, that Rabeka was looking for a job. Now the moon is naked, with no clouds to cover it.'

Mma-Rabeka proffered an open palm towards Mathilda. 'Please lend me your cell-phone. I want to speak to Lobisa, my younger sister who is looking after Rabeka.'

That Sunday afternoon TM was showing all and sundry the City Press article in front of his house when Mma-Rabeka passed by in the street.

Rabeka's mother who was in the company of a relative, stopped, called and beckoned TM over.

A bright smile on his face, TM walked to Rabeka's mother. 'You must be the happiest woman in the village; look your daughter is appearing in the newspapers,' said TM after they had exchanged the greetings.

'The happiest woman in the village? When my daughter is wasting time with the job...why do I call it a job because she's doesn't even bring a cent?'

TM paused thoughtfully. 'Every good thing has a foundation mamma. Tomorrow your daughter...'

'Teacher Matlamela,' she addressed him respectfully and formally as the villagers were fond of doing, 'please don't tell me about tomorrow because tomorrow is unknown.'

TM paused and smiled at Mma-Rabeka; she was still in an upset mood. 'You are a teacher earning a salary every month and you are misleading our daughter to do something that will not guarantee a salary at the end of the month.'

Stung by her anger and what she said, TM kept quiet for a moment. 'Mamma,' he said softly, 'We aren't gifted the same way, and we aren't called to follow the same professions. Some of us must do teaching or nursing while others are born to do performing arts. Time will come when she'll earn a good salary like well-known artists who are making a good living.'

6

Straight after the 'Well-done party,' when Rabeka arrived at her aunt's house, Thabang told her that Mma-Rabeka had phoned her mother.

Thabang also told Rabeka that her mother had gone to the meeting of the women's burial society, and that they should strategise on what they should tell her when she came back. Following a lengthy brain-storming discussion, Rabeka and Thabang were ready about what they would tell Thabang's mother.

When her mother arrived Thabang did not hesitate to play advocate for Rabeka: she convinced her mother that Rabeka wasn't wasting her time in the performing arts; that she was practicing for careers such as radio, tv, public relations and other fancy jobs.

On Monday Rabeka helped her aunt with a lot of domestic chores; she also washed her own clothes. As there were no rehearsals for the week she decided to visit her parents on Thursday. A daughter of their next-door neighbour who had gone to the cafe came back with a copy of the local newspaper, 'Mamelodi Sun' and proudly showed Rabeka the article about their prize-winning performance and her photo. Rabeka was indeed thrilled to read a poetic caption: *'Riveting Reebbs- a star is discovered... a flower never born to blush unseen, wasting its sweet scent in the 'desert' air of Limpopo.*

At dusk Rabeka's youngest aunt, aunt Kedibone passed at the house; she was holding the City Press newspaper's clipping. After greeting Thabang and her mother, Aunt Kedibone hugged and kissed her niece whom she said had made them proud. 'Today we are people because of you!' she said with dewy eyes. Rabeka's mother was the eldest, followed by Thabang's mother and Aunt Kedibone.

'Sesi (elder sister) Lobisa,' that was how aunt Kedibone addressed Thabang's mother, whose official name in her identity document was 'Louisa.' 'Even now as I walked to this place,' she enthused, 'many people stopped me and congratulated me because of what our girl has done.' Aunt Kedibone patted Rabeka's shoulder, 'Well-done my girl!'

Rabeka chuckled at the compliment. Thabang brought tea and biscuits and they poured for themselves and began to drink and to nibble.

Aunt Kedibone looked at the newspaper article with relish. In the photo Rabeka was wearing the dress which she herself had designed and sewed!

'Thanks for the dress, Aunt Kedibone!' said Rabeka, 'I don't know how to thank you.'

Aunt Kedibone chuckled very contentedly. 'Your thanks is when you are a great artist like Sibongile Khumalo.'

Thabang glanced smilingly at Rabeka, and they laughed aloud.

Thabang's mother looked quizzically at Aunt Kedibone. 'But her parents don't want her to do acting. *Ausi Dora* phoned me yesterday.' She was referring to Rabeka's mother. 'She's accusing me for fooling her that Mpekana was doing well in looking for a job. *Ausi Dora* said I should have told her that Mpekana was doing acting and was not looking for a real job. She says it's time wasting, and that it brings no money. I didn't know. Mpekana and Thabang did not tell me the truth. Am I lying Mpekana?'

'You are not lying, aunt Lobisa.' said Rabeka.

'Please stop using that embarrassing name, *sesi Lobisa*,' aunt Kedibone chided Thabang's mother, 'Stop calling her Mpekana, Mpekana. She's now *Reeb*, a famous actress and singer!' aunt Kedibone, radiated a mischievous smile, raised her shoulder and shook them backwards and forward -starting with her left shoulder-while dropping her loose and relaxed palms, on arms that had been stretched and slightly raised. 'She's a *cel-e-e-e-b* you know!'

Rabeka and Thabang laughed aloud.

'Aunt Kedi!' Rabeka addressed aunt Kedibone endearingly, 'You should consider a career in acting!'

Aunt Kedibone laughed deliriously.

'RB is right!' agreed Thabang.

Aunt Kedibone continued to laugh and all of them joined her.

Twenty minutes later Thabang's mother sauntered with aunt Kedibone, accompanying her to her house. At the moment Rabeka was returning from the washing line with a huge bundle of sun-dried clothes. Rabeka thought about aunt Kedibone: *That's the aunt I should be staying with; she understands me better than my mother.*

'*Sesi Dora* is wrong!' said aunt Kedibone, 'she must just let the girl do what she's good at. Instead of appreciating that *Reeb* is giving the clan a good name, she's discouraging her! I'm going to speak to her tonight!'

7

On Tuesday in the afternoon Rabeka strolled to the shopping mall near Denneboon station to buy some groceries. She was entering the shopping centre when she heard a car hooting; she saw a red BMW cruising towards her, and windows rolled down and heads emerged. A bald-headed man with a black beard that had a brush of grayness was at the driver's seat; there was another man whose face looked familiar smiling at her. The familiar face whose smile intensified, waved at her.

She hesitated to wave back at him. She thought it was one of the umpteen playboys of Mamelodi; she was reminded of the day JR tried to jack-roll her. So she never looked back again; she continued strutting towards the Shoprite hypermarket. She kept thinking of the giants of the valley in that part of the world, the giants determined to wreck her precious dream.

When she had done her shopping she decided to spoil herself with fried chicken, chips, buns, and cool-drink at KFC next to the exit-entrance of the shopping mall. She had saved some daily allowance money during the recent Windybrow Arts Festival. She had bought 'Top 100 Achievers' a popular young women's monthly magazine which she browsed as her order was on its way. Her eyes were attracted by the headline 'Recording sharks.'

Before she could read, her eyes quickly landed on the a subheading entitled in bold cursive, *Producers try to break you down so-that you believe that you cannot make it without them ... for some girls the way towards stardom is through the producer's bed.* And the last subheading: *it requires a lot of strength and character to survive in this industry.* She then reflected on how the village star had succumbed to the giant in the form of a seductive producer. She thought she should suggest that TM should include that bit in 'The Dream Girl' play.

Her order came and she began to eat. When she looked through the glass wall she saw a red BMW parking; the two occupants, including the familiar face she had seen, stepped out and walked towards the entrance of KFC.

As the two men walked towards her table in the corner, she held her breath. She now recognised the familiar face as Gooshkah Baloi, a tall and hefty man. Although she had twice visited Gooshkah's theatre company she had never spoken to him. Gooshkah radiating a 'cheese' type of a smile, proffered a strong hand towards Rabeka. 'I'm Gooshkah Baloi.'

'I know you,' said Rabeka coyly, 'I came twice to your group. I was visiting Patience Maluleka.'

Gooshkah nodded, smiled genially, and scratched his lush beard which some admirers had compared to Castro's.

Gooshkah gestured towards the man who was with him. 'He's my cousin.'

The man and Rabeka exchanged handshakes.

'She's Reeb's Ma...' Gooshkah introduced Rabeka to his cousin.

'Maru-a-pula,' completed Rabeka.

'I know her,' said the man.

Rabeka smiled.

Talking in xiTsonga Gooshkah's cousin said goodbye and left.

'Can I join you?'

'I don't know.'

'If you don't know, it's not happening and you don't want to waste your precious life by performing for nothing. Reeb do a sensible thing by joining my group. By working with Junior you will be...'

'No, I can't leave bra Junior. It's not fair...'

'Okay, be fair and be poor! By working with him you'll be signing a contract of poverty and starvation. When Junior receives funding what does he do? I left his company because he once received funding and used it to buy his family some furniture and a van. When we asked for our money he just came up with all sorts of stories until we realised that we had no chance of getting it. Go and check if my story is untrue. And you will know the true colours of Junior,' he said as observed that Rabeka was busy digesting what he was telling her. 'He sleeps with the girls in his company; he calls that fringe benefits.'

'If you're prepared to warm his hotel bed, then remain part of his group. My advice is: leave his group before he fires you for refusing to sleep with him. When I was still part of his group we once confronted him for sleeping with the girls. And you know what he said? He raised his little finger and said: 'I have a little penis, that's why I want young things!'

Suddenly Gooshkah took out something out of his pocket which he hid in his right clenched fist; he opened Rabeka's palm, transferred what was in his hand, closed her hand, and rose from his chair. 'Take this little gift! I'll call you tonight!'

'How did you get my number?' asked Rabeka, who was getting confused: things were happening so fast that she thought she was dreaming.

Gooshkah gave her a bitter-sweet smile. 'None of your business!'

Gooshkah hurried out of KFC. She saw him walking to the red BMW waiting outside.

For a brief moment as Gooshkah sat in the car he looked across towards eatery, and his eyes landed on the table where Rabeka was sitting. He felt she looked transfixed with a feeling he could not explain. He was satisfied that she had swallowed the bait. He was convinced he had snatched her out of Junior's hands. *Next year the floating trophy of the Windybrow Arts Festival is ours!* he vowed, as the car cruised towards the intersection.

8

Rabeka dropped her shopping plastic bag in the kitchen and walked to her back-room. There she sat on the bed and took out a small plastic bag that Gooshkah had shoved into her hand. She recalled hearing him say: *Take this little gift! I'll call you tonight.* Her heart thudded *Gooh-gooh-gooh!* as she opened the plastic bag, wondering what it could be containing.

She held her breath and looked carefully. She saw some bluish bank-notes. She heaved a sigh and began to count the money: it was R1 500. She bent, rested her elbows on her knees and contained her chin with her hands, where the knuckles met her palms. She was beginning to digest the reality of Gooshkah's 'little gift.' She had never received that kind of money in her life. Her mind quickly told her what she could with it: cosmetics, clothes, shoes, earrings and um... *Stop!* she instructed her mind.

What does the little gift mean? Is this a bribe? Will he own me? Is this opening a door for him for sexual favours? Her industrious mind unleashed questions begging for answers. *If he calls tonight, she spoke to herself, I'm going to tell him to come and take his money! What does he take me for? A cheap township girl?*

Walking to the kitchen to prepare dinner, she recalled Junior's words during the 'Well-done party' just two days ago on Sunday: *I've made you famous and no-one is going to leave me and join another group. I'm not going to allow anyone to pluck the fruit I have sweated for. If anyone is going to leave I know what I'm going to do, and that's no empty threat!*

As Rabeka was preparing dinner her aunt sauntered into the kitchen; realising that Rabeka was in deep thought, she stopped and studied her face. Sensing that someone was behind her, Rabeka turned and her eyes met the eyes of her smiling aunt. Her aunt was fond of a game of sneaking behind his relatives and children in order to pinch the napes of their necks. Her aunt greeted her and walked to her bedroom. After she had taken a few steps the aunt stopped and sneaked a look at her niece.

'Reeb's,' it was the first time her aunt had addressed her in that manner. Her aunt had been persuaded by Rabeka's younger aunt that Rabeka deserved to be addressed with the name worthy of a 'celeb.' 'Is something bothering you?'

'No aunt Lobisa; why?' Rabeka disagreed.

'I can read from your face,' insisted her aunt.

Rabeka kept quiet and smiled, knowing full well that the old lady had read her face accurately.

'I met Gooshkah today at the shopping centre. Guess what he recruited me to join his group,' Rabeka told Thabang as they washed the crockery after dinner.

'Did you agree?'

'He didn't want an answer.'

'What do you think about him? How did you feel as he talked to you?'

'I felt like *uhm*... I felt that kind of an attraction towards something I mustn't do...'

'Something like a forbidden fruit?'

'Yah, sort of! And he told me a lot of things about Junior.'

'Bad things?'

'Yes!'

'And you believe them?'

'I don't know, I'm not sure. But some things sound convincing, or I feel they can happen.'

For a moment the two girls' minds were mulling over the issue.

'What do you think I should do?' asked Rabeka.

'Just listen to your heart. If you think you must work with Gooshkah then maybe take a risk.'

Rabeka was a little surprised by what had come out of Thabang's mouth: *maybe take a risk*. She felt those words should have been suggested by her mentor, TM who might have prefaced his advice with: *If you are convinced you have spent a lot of time in the comfort zone. He could have added: and then walk towards new ventures in your journey towards the promised land*. Rabeka was delighted that her knowledge and inspiration from the 'Realise Your Dream' project was rubbing onto her cousin.

'Gooshkah said: "Take this little gift! I'll call you tonight!" But I have made up my mind: If he calls me tonight, I'm going to tell him to come and take his money!'

'Why?'

'What does he take me for? I'm not a cheap township girl who can easily...'

'RB! RB! Don't be stupid!' Rabeka was stunned by Thabang's bluntness.

Rabeka's cell-phone rang and she pressed the call-answering button; she held her breath for a few seconds before whispering 'hallo', as if she had received the call in the middle of an important meeting. Rabeka asked the person she was speaking to hold on. Then she, Rabeka blocked the ear-piece of her cell-phone and smiled to and whispered to Thabang.

'It's not Gooshkah!'

After the call, Thabang smiled at Rabeka. 'Who's the person?' she was curious to know.

'It's one a journalists from the local newspaper. She's asking me if I was happy with the story and the pictures..'

'You're now in demand RB! And you are going to get more job offers!'

Rabeka chuckled at the complement.

'If I'll agree to work with Gooshkah,' said Rabeka, 'I don't know how I'm going to face Junior... he made me a little famous...it's not fair that I should...'

'Is life always fair?' retorted Thabang.

Rabeka recalled Gooshkah's words: *Okay be fair and be poor!*

'If I were you,' said Thabang, 'I would take Gooshkah's money. You must not refuse to eat when you are not sick. Just take it as money given to you for something you will still do. Does this make you feel better?'

'Yah...I'm not sure,' she paused. 'Does that mean I'm going to leave Junior. That's not...!' She swallowed 'fair'.

'That you can still think about it. But don't return the money to Gooshkah. May be you can teach his group about the 'Realise Your Dream', while you are still with Junior's group.'

Rabeka thought over Thabang's words, and she thought she had a very shrewd cousin who deserved a pinch on the arm and a warm smile.

On Wednesday Thabang went to work while Rabeka was still feeling sleepy; she had no reason to wake up early as she was on vacation. In the afternoon Rabeka bustled with a lot of chores. The next day she would be going home by a taxi. After lunch she was busy ironing some clothes when she received a call from Gooshkah.

'I'm sorry I couldn't phone you last night,' said Gooshkah, 'I was attending to some emergencies.'

'It's okay bra Gooshkah,' responded Rabeka.

'I hope you've made up your mind to join my cast,' he said forthrightly, his voice pregnant with nothing but confidence. 'If you're going to miss this golden opportunity, you're going to regret it. And those who'll want to come into the group later when they see us going places, aren't going to get a chance!'

She kept quiet until Gooshkah said. 'Are you still there?'

'Yes bra Gooshka! I've decided to join your company,' Rabeka felt as if it was another voice, perhaps a demon's voice speaking.

'*Moja, moja!* Reebis!' said elated Gooshkah. 'Tuesday 24th we shall do casting and start with rehearsals in the afternoon or on Wednesday.'

'Thanks bra Gooshkah!'

'*Moja, moja!*'

She closed her fold-open cell-phone, still hearing Gooshkah's voice: '*Moja, moja!*' She felt like someone caught up in a drunken stupor. *Have I done the right thing?* she asked herself. *No you have done a wrong thing!* said a hoarse voice; she quickly knew it wasn't hers but someone else's.

Can it be a demon's voice or Junior's? *Yes, I have done the right thing!* she said to herself. She was speaking aloud because she was the only person in the house. *I know I've done the right thing by looking for greener pastures,* she justified. *But what if there are snakes lurking in the green grass?* She talked back: *Are you trying to scare me?* The voice persisted: *Why do you think you've done the right...?* She interrupted: *Ach shutt-upp wena!*

At that moment she felt she saw TM place his forefinger on his closed lips, saying 'Hush!' just before stepping in as her advocate: *Because,* said TM, *life consists of nothing but slices of comfort zone that must be eaten.* The evil voice jeered at TM. The moment of stupor gradually subsided and was replaced by a feeling of sobriety which increased until it was full-blast.

She prepared some tea and sandwich for lunch. She felt she was munching slices of comfort zones. Her mind was on Junior. *How will Junior react if I tell him I'm joining Gooshkah's group? What will Junior do to me when he discovers that I'm working with Gooshkah? Was he just trying to scare them? Will he cry, swear at me, or throttle me? Did he do anything to anyone in the past? Only God knows!*

When Thabang came from work Rabeka told her that she will be joining Gooshkah's group.

'And you're satisfied with the decision you've made?' inquired Thabang.

'Yes, but I feel guilty for quitting Junior's company. It seems I'll only find peace when I've told Junior.'

'Why should you tell him? Just hit him with a bomb. RB, welcome to the dog eats dog city jungle! If artists have to say nice goodbyes before they leave their bosses, we

would not know of all these great artists today. So, hit him with a bomb!' Rabeka quietly digested Thabang's advice.

'You just go and work with Gooshkah,' continued Thabang. 'If things don't go well with Gooshkah you come back to Junior and cook up a story...If Junior finds out that you are working for Gooshkah and he begs you to come back you tell him: *How much are you prepared to pay me?* That's how artists survive in this part of the world.'

Again Rabeka was quiet for a long time, reflecting on her cousin's 'words of wisdom'.

'At least let me tell him I'm going home,' said Rabeka.

'That you can do.'

In Thabang's presence Rabeka called Junior. 'Bra Junior, on Monday the 16th when rehearsals start I'll still be at home. I'll have to help with a lot of chores because I've been away from home for some time.'

'When are you coming back?' asked Junior.

'It could be the 19th, but I'll tell you if I'll stay longer.'

Rabeka felt if she were not in Thabang's presence, she would have confessed to Junior. She was feeling that the showbiz life was a life of lies, tricks, cheating, and other forms of crookedness. She wondered if life would be like in the next five or ten years or twenty years. She felt she had reached a point of no return. She wondered if one could be a principled person and still pursue a successful career in the performing arts.

That evening as Rabeka was about to sleep - she had decided to sleep earlier so that she should have enough rest for an early morning taxi ride to Polokwane.

She began to ask herself questions which invited other questions; as a result she could not fall asleep for some hours. When she at last fell asleep she dreamt about Junior who had visited her at her aunt's house; an urge to run away overtook her and she tried to do that, but in a moment she had her back against the wall, and Junior pointed at her with an index finger. *You know what I'm here for, Reeb. If you're going to leave my group I know what I'm going to do, and that's no empty threat, Reeb!*

9

An hour after she arrived home, as she had 'home-welcoming' tea with her parents, she assured them, as she had strategised with Thabang, that her acting was just a stepping stone, towards better careers. 'For us young people to get better-paying jobs,' Rabeka told them, gesturing towards a sassy youth TV presenter on the TV in the lounge, 'we must speak good English. And acting teaches us how to speak very well. And how to be confident.'

She also told them that she would be working with man called Mr Baloi, in a 'Drugs Don't Pay' kind of drama. She chose not to mention the name 'Gooshkah' which she felt could be suggestive of a city confidence trickster. Her parents exchanged glances.

'Your aunt, Kedibone phoned me,' her mother told her, 'Did you ask her to call me?'

'No.' Rabeka felt like also asking 'why?'

Her mother had to say more when Rabeka gave her a questioning look. 'She said I should be proud of you because your name and face have appeared in the newspaper. And she said I should appreciate you instead of telling you to do other jobs. I don't know why she's protruding her nose into my affairs.'

'I didn't ask her to phone you, *mma*,' re-iterated Rabeka.

After supper before her father went to sleep at 20h30 - he was an early sleeper - Rabeka called her parents who joined her in the lounge. She switched off the TV to underline the importance of the meeting.

'My parents, I have brought you a little gift from the city,' said Rabeka, handing an envelope to her mother sitting next to her; it held.

R1 500 which Gooshkah had given her. Her mother counted it, and handed it to her father. 'Pap'a Rabeka, the child has brought some little fat.'

Rabeka's father received the envelop with a nod; he also counted the money and handed the envelope to her mother. 'Tell her we have received the honey with hearts as white as egrets,' he said.

Rabeka's mother again smiled at her daughter. 'We have received the fat with gladness; we thank you, whose totem is a buffalo!'

Rabeka's heart galloped with joy when she heard her mother appreciating what she had done by mentioning their clan-name. The last time this was used was when her parents bade her farewell at the taxi route in the village before she went to the technikon. Her mother had said: 'Go well and do well at school, you whose totem is a buffalo!'

Her mother emphasised their appreciation by applauding gently twice in the manner of the tribes-people. Her father grinned. Rabeka gave them a smile she felt would patch the cracks in their relationship. She was satisfied that the money she had given them would afford her some breathing space she needed so much to concentrate on the passion of her life: being a performing artist.

On Friday Rabeka did not feel like going anywhere. She had missed her parents and her home; so she compensated for time lost. Chores she had not done such as hoeing, tending the flowers, and sweeping the *lapa* proved refreshing. Having meals and tea with her parents were a source of great satisfaction.

On Saturday she was ready to go out and meet the people of the village in the afternoon. Significantly TM had invited her to meet the members of the 'Realise Your Dream' project at the usual venue, Thuto-ke-Kotse Primary School. It could have taken her 30 minutes to walk to the venue, but she arrived there an hour later; she had stopped many times to chat to people old and young. The theme of the conversations was the same: they told her how they were proud of her when they saw her face in the City Press, how she had helped to put the village of Nobody on the map; one young person said she hoped to see Rabeka on the TV.

As she entered the school gate she had under her arm-pit the 'Top 100 Achievers,' which she had decided to show TM. The magazine had an article about recording sharks. She paced towards the school hall. When she was half-way next to a parking area, she heard the sound of an approaching car shaken by the bumpy dirt-road; it was TM in his burgundy Ford Cortina.

Rabeka stopped and turned towards him, her smile shining like the midday sun. TM was all smiles as he hopped out of his car; you could count his white-white teeth as he galloped towards her. He hugged her, kissed her on her left cheek and lifted her a few centimetres above the ground in sheer excitement. They both looked into each other's eyes and laughed aloud. They walked hand-in-hand to the venue where all the group members were waiting. She received 24 tight hugs and a few kisses.

There they were, the village performers of 'The Dream Girl', they who aspired to realise their dreams, seated in front of her. They were heart-broken when she left them; now they were delighted to meet one of their kind who had made an impact as a performing artist in the city over three hundred miles from the humble village of Nobody. TM and her were standing; he was holding her hand.

He turned towards her, his smile never fading but radiant. 'I'm exceedingly delighted that Rebecca is in our midst today.' He paused and smiled at her. 'Just before she left she told me: "I'm a great mind, and I'm going to make things happen in Pretoria!"'

Rabeka chuckled.

Suddenly Sethunya stood up chanting: 'We came!'

'We performed! We conquered!' they hollered the affirmation of excellence from Junior Makhura's group.

They applauded as she had a good laugh.

'Over to you Rebecca! In our language we say: "The ear has not lid!"'

'I'm also delighted to be back here, bra T.' said Rabeka. TM noted that she now addressed her as 'bra T' and no more 'bra TM'. He thought it was a fascinating development. That put a smile on his clean-shaven face. 'I'm delighted to see all your bright faces, and your bright eyes full of dreams. I have very little to share because I haven't gone very far. You might have seen my face in City Press and Mamelodi Sun. But the journey is still very long. I have just scratched the surface. Because I haven't gone very far, I haven't met the giants of the valley. But I can promise you that when time comes for me to meet the giants I'm not going to turn back.'

She combed her forehead. 'No ways! I'm going to step forward on the journey until I

reach the Promised Land!

They applauded.

'I will always recall bra T's words of encouragement,' she continued, 'when he said to me just before I left: 'Go for it Rebecca. I believe in you! You have the potential to be a great artist!'

They applauded. Her cell-phone rang and she answered it.

It was aunt Mpule. 'Hallo Rabbeh, I heard you've come home. How's life?'

'Great aunt Mpule!'

'Listen, Rabbeh, I'm inviting you for lunch at my house on Sunday with Pastor Jackie. Is that okay?'

'I greatly appreciate, auntie. It's an honour. I'll come!'

Rabeka closed her cell-phone. 'Sorry guys!'

She told them about her experiences in Junior's group. She also told them that she would be working with Gooshkah's company. 'In this industry if you rest you rust!' she justified.

After a question and answer session, she called TM aside. She took out a photostated article about recording sharks from the magazine, and handed it to him. TM was thrilled as he glanced at the story. Rabeka pointed to a sub-heading in bold cursive. 'Bra T, I think we should include this line in the script: "*Producers try to break you down so-that you should believe that you cannot make it without them.*"

When TM had finished reading she pointed again to another paragraph. 'And this one here: "*for some girls the way towards stardom is through the producer's bed.*"'

'Excellent!' appreciated TM.

The members performed 'The Dream Girl' and she imparted her valuable experiences and skills for the next two hours.

That Sunday after the church service, aunt Mpule, Pastor Jackie and Rabeka had lunch. Aunt Mpule had asked one of her relatives who used to be a domestic to prepare a sumptuous lunch. As they sat down on the table the smell of fried chicken and fried potato had wafted to the dining room. Unhurried, they savoured their food.

'We heard the good news that you are becoming a famous person'.

'Who told you that Pastor?' Rabeka challenged her pastor playfully.

'We all saw your face appearing in City Press, alongside the picture of the great singer Sibongile Khumalo,' said Pastor Jackie.

'I'm where I am because of your prayers, Pastor. I still have many challenges ahead of me, and I'm asking for more prayers!'

'I'll pray for you,' responded the priest.

Aunt Mpule brushed Rabeka's arm. 'This one is destined for great things. I told her that if being a star is what God has given her, she must go for it and achieve her dream.'

The pastor nodded and gazed into Rabeka's pupils. 'Like Joseph in the bible God has given you a dream.'

Rabeka nodded smilingly.

'But when you have a big dream,' the pastor added, 'you're going to face trials just like Joseph. But we are going to pray for you.'

'Thank you pastor!'

The man of God raised his right index finger. 'I hope your little fame will make it easy for

you to promote God's Kingdom. You cannot go on serving satan with your talent.'

'Time will come pastor,' said Rabeka following a pause. 'For the moment I'm still equipping myself. When I return to Pretoria I'm going to act in play that encourages young people to stop taking drugs.'

'Wonderful!' said the pastor. 'Is it a gospel play?'

'I don't think so,' responded Rabeka.

'I'm glad it's not a gospel play,' said Aunt Mpule, making the man of God a little perplexed. 'Let me explain, Pastor: I don't think it's good idea that Rabeka should be involved only with Christian projects. She's a child of light, so let's allow her to work with children of darkness. She'll influence them positively.'

'Hallelujah!' the pastor smacked the table with his palm.

When they had expertly demolished what was in front of them, they were served with custard and chocolate.

Rabeka's cell-phone rang. It was Junior. He wanted to know if she was coming on Monday. He wanted to tell her about the new project but she politely cut him short, saying she was attending an important engagement; she vaguely told him to call her 'sometime' during the new week.

'But I have not peace about this guy... what's his name?' asked aunt Mpule as they walked the pastor out of her house, two hours later.

'Gooshkah.'

'I don't know why. Maybe it's because he has a name that makes me think of a gogga.'

They laughed.

'But I'll pray for you,' aunt Mpule gave some hope.

'Yes we must raise our holy hands against the evil one,' said Pastor Jackie.

The car of the man of the cloth honked and drove away; Rabeka and aunt Mpule waved at the pastor and walked back to the house.

'Where will your drama group meet?' asked Aunt Mpule.

'In the city centre.'

Aunt Mpule told Rabeka that within two weeks she would be in Pretoria, attending a workshop organised by the Head Office, Department of Education. She promised that she would call Rabeka so-that they could meet.

Although she was enjoying being at home, her heart was on the challenges that lay ahead. She was thinking about the first meeting with Gooshkah's groups on Saturday. So her busy life at home where she helped with umpteen chores and the thoughts about the new project, all put together pushed the days of the week in-out-in-out... and before long it was Friday, the day of her departure.

Her prayer that she should not meet Sekiele had been answered: she never saw him. She wasn't sure if he had completely given up all hope of having her as his wife. *If I had agreed to marry Sekiel, I would have been trapped in the comfort zone of a housewife, nappies, gaining weight, and the meetings of the women at the church,* she thought with a great relief.

10 Saturday, the third week of May, as she had noted in her pocket diary, she took a taxi to the city where she was going to attend the first meeting of the rehearsal with Gooshkah's group. She was a few minutes early. As the girls and boys were arriving Rabeka was eager to meet Patience Maluleka, the girl she was certain would become her bosom friend. The moment Patience saw Rabeka she rushed to her, hugged, kissed her. Patience held Rabeka by her hands. 'Chomie, I'm excited that you're part of the group! Welcome super-star!!'

Rabeka laughed and Patience laughed with her.

As her eyes explored the rehearsal room, originally an old house fitted with a wooden floor, more performers arrived, and the sound of '*gooh-gooh-gooh*' could be heard. They all introduced themselves as they shook hands with her, as it was the culture of the group. One guy who introduced himself as Sbu, a short for Sbusiso, had at his gregarious best opened his palms for her to bash them, and she exposed her palms which the young man smacked, hollering: 'Hola!'. Rabeka laughed aloud feeling as if Sbu was her old buddy. Coffee-coloured Sbu who had trimmed his beard to form letter 'V' and had a silver earring on his left ear and his hair was plaited with extensions that stretched along down his neck.

Rabeka saw a well-built girl, her face showing tribal marks that had left permanent thin scars shaped like two elevens on both cheeks, stepping towards her; this made it easy for Rabeka to identify her as a member of the Balobedu tribe in the north of Limpopo.

'I'm Bobo.' she introduced herself to Rabeka who also introduced herself. Bobo wore a pair of a faded pair of jeans and tackies. Rabeka wasn't sure if Bobo liked her; she felt her smile was not genuine. Bobo reminded her of Bathini, the girl she had met in Junior Makhura's group.

In the midst of the merry chatting and movement taking place, Gooshkah entered. As it was winter he wore an old black leather jacket, grey corduroys and old but tough pair of brown calf-length boots. After he had removed his jacket and hung it on his chair - the director's chair, he beckoned over Rabeka; she sat on an empty chair next to him. He chatted to her for a few seconds.

In the usual style, Gooshkah clapped his palms twice and silence descended. The group members shuffled and sat on chairs leaning against the wall. Gooshkah held Rabeka by the arm, and walked with her from the director's chair towards the middle of the room. 'I have a new member to introduce.'

'We know her!' shouted one girl.

'We know her!' shouted more voices.

'Who's she?'

'Reebs!'

'*Moja! Moja!*' he paused, emitting a smile that exposed his broad teeth. 'Reebs do you know all of them?'

Rabeka shook her head with a coy smile.

'Okay you'll get to know them as you work with them.' He paused for a few seconds. 'As you all know she was in Junior's group. But she has decided to seek greener pastures. Please make her feel at home!'

They applauded.

He told them about the 'Stop the Drugs' project: that it was sponsored by the City Health, that they had only three weeks to rehearse the script because they wanted to save costs; that they would be given an allowance of R500 a week and that on the day of the performance they would be given R1000 and R1500, and that they would rehearse for six days from Mondays to Saturdays.

Gooshkah also introduced the key personnel: Sbu would help in warm up exercises and serve as a stage manager; Bobo would be responsible for Zulu dance, and Rabeka would be assistant director. Lastly he mentioned that a guy called Mervin Joubert would join the group on Thursday when the rehearsals were in progress; he explained that Mervin had been brought on board to weave in modern dance, which would be necessary towards the end of the play.

For the next thirty minutes Sbu made them do warm up exercises and within minutes the smell of combined sweat filled the room although windows were opened. Sweat drops could be seen on their faces. Gooshkah took over with voice training that lasted for thirty minutes.

He also counted the spiral bound scripts; he paused and raised his head: 'The theme of the play is "Drugs Don't pay". Here is the summary: it's about Jaluza, an 18 year-old drugs-taking and drug-pushing boy who becomes an anti-drugs activist and a positive change-agent. How does it happen? In his activities in drug-peddling, the car in which he's travelling with companions-in-crime is chased by the police; his car craches, and he is admitted to hospital with a fractured arm. When he comes out of the hospital he goes to his mother who is a single parent; he then hands himself to the police; the men of law take him to the social workers who are organising an anti-drug day. Jaluza becomes an anti-drug activist. Do you find it interesting?'

'Yes!'

'Sure bra Gooshkah!' said Sbu.

'You are going to like it. There are many interesting roles; roles such as the boy's mother, drug pushers, the drug-lord, the police, the magistrate, the social workers and so on. But it's important that the play should inform while it entertains. That's why we're adding dance and music. It's thirty minutes long. Just read through during the weekend to get an idea about where the story is going. On Monday I'm going to audition you.'

During the weekend Rabeka was so busy reading the script and deciding which roles interested her that she forgot about Junior. She liked the role of 'Vie-Vie' the girl member of 'The Cool-cats,' the three young drug-takers and pushers. She decided she would ask Gooshkah to do the part.

As she entered the rehearsal room the reality that Junior could phone dawned on her and she decided to switch off her cell-phone. It was an important house rule that all cell-phones should be switched off except during lunch between 13h00 and 14h00. Following a warm up exercises and voice-training it was serious the business of script reading; as most of the performers indicated the parts they were interested in, Rabeka told Gooshkah that 'Vie-Vie' was her favourite part.

Gooshkah later changed his mind and had decided that for certain important character such as Vie-Vie, Jaluza, Jaluza's mother and two members of 'The Cool Cats' three performers should audition. He wanted to make certain that he had given a lot of performers an opportunity to cast for the roles so that no-one should complain later that

so-and-so had been favoured; he wanted the performers to be audiences and to decide who performed which role excellently. So he told Rabeka and the two girls that on Wednesday they would compete for the part of Vie-Vie.

Junior called her at 10h00 but Rabeka had switched off her cell-phone. Between 13h00 and 14h00 they broke for lunch.

As the cast had not received their weekly allowance they collected coins from the members in what was known according to the group culture as the '*gazata*': they dropped some coins into someone's cap, and the money was used to buy lunch of about five white loaves of bread, polony, chips, aachaar and sometimes a smaller polony known as '*mashangani voroso*'. They would rely on the '*gazata*' until Thursday. On Friday they would be given their weekly R500 amounts.

During lunch Rabeka switched on her cell-phone. When it rang she glanced at the screen of her cell-phone and realised it was Junior; she did not answer the phone until the voicemail handled the task of telling the caller to call later.

On Tuesday during break Rabeka's cell-phone rang and it was Junior; she did not answer it until the voicemail served as her PA. Her cell-phone rang again within a few minutes, and she gladly realised it was aunt Mpule, who informed her that she had arrived in the city on Sunday afternoon, and promised to call Rabeka the following day.

Junior wanted Rabeka desperately. So he decided to go to her aunt's place. When he arrived there he could not find her; he found Thabang.

'Reeba hasn't returned; she's still in Limpopo,' lied streetwise Thabang, working very hard to protect her cousin. After all she was the one who had encouraged her that in the city 'a dog eats another dog.'

'But she doesn't answer my phone,' growled suspicious Junior, after a long pause. Junior called Rabeka in the presence of Thabang who held her breath wishing not be exposed as a liar. Fortunately for Thabang Junior was answered by Rabeka's voicemail. Junior scowled and Thabang guessed that the gadget must have given him something unpalatable. Had Rabeka not been delayed by the rehearsals Junior would have found her. Gooshkah had kept the group one and half hours longer than usual.

11 The following Tuesday Junior again went to Rabeka's aunt's house. Rabeka was there hiding in her bedroom. She had just changed into 'home clothes' when she saw Junior entering at the gate. Again Thabang lied to Junior, saying that Rabeka had returned to Pretoria but that she had gone to town.

Junior walked to his van angrily but he returned to Thabang who was standing at the doorway.

He waved his forefinger: 'If Reeb's is hiding somewhere in the house I want her to hear me.' He raised his voice, 'Reeb's, I heard rumours that you have joined Gooshkah's company. You were just a simple girl from Limpopo. Reeb's I've made you famous and you aren't going to leave me and join another group. I have planted and nourished a fruit tree, with so much sweat and another bastard just comes and plucks the fruit! Listen, if you're going to leave I know what I'm going to do, and that's no empty threat!'

He hurried to his van fuming.

A few minutes after Junior's van had left, Rabeka emerged from her bedroom. Thabang gave her a nasty look. 'RB, you must handle your problems. I'm tired of being your lying Personal Assistant,' said Thabang angrily, 'I can't continue to be your shock absorber!'

'I'm very sorry Thabang,' she sighed. 'I think I must go and stay somewhere until...'

'Yes, find alternative accommodation somewhere, please!' Thabang was still fed-up.

'I can't face Junior. I don't want to hurt him. And I don't want to lie. So the best thing is to avoid answering his calls, and to avoid meeting him personally.'

'Until when?'

'I don't know. I hope he'll just lose interest and forget about me. If I meet him, I'll see how to handle him.'

Before she slept, Rabeka called Patience and asked for alternative accommodation. Patience said Rabeka was welcome to stay with her, she added she would inform her mother who worked for parliament and was based in Cape Town. The same night Thabang and Rabeka had cooked up a story to be eaten by Thabang's mother. They told her that because of rehearsals that finish late at night, Rabeka had to stay with her friend Patience. When Rabeka told her that it was a middle class family with the mother doing an important job in parliament, she agreed.

On Wednesday morning Rabeka took enough clothes to last for two weeks. Rabeka hoped that after two weeks Junior would have tired of chasing after her. After she had arrived at the rehearsals venue and was having tea her cell-phone rang and as usual she checked the screen. It was aunt Mpule, who told Rabeka that they could meet at about 17h00 at a fried chicken place at the corner of Nelson Mandela Drive and Mangaliso Sobukwe Avenue.

A few moments later after they had just done the warm-up exercise, Rabeka saw a light-complexioned, slim young man entering the rehearsal room, waving to all and sundry saying 'Hola! Hola!' They responded with 'Hola-hola!' The beau, who had plaited his short brown hair, walked on heavy-duty dark brown shoes in her direction. She held her breath.

Rabeka's body generated unprecedented heat. The guy looked around. When his eyes landed on her, she felt her heart skipping like *kgosi*, the village children's skipping rope; she felt she liked him and soon she was honest with herself that she loved him. No! She desired him so intensely that she felt that he was the kind of a dude she would undress for and...

As the beau took another step towards Rabeka, Bobo strutted towards him and intercepted his move. 'Hi gorgeous! You haven't given me a special 'Hole!' she said.

The young man pushed Bobo aside, focusing on the object of his desire in front of his predatory eyes.

He took the last step and gazed into Rabeka's pupils. 'Mervin Joubert is my name,' he introduced himself with strong handshake. A broad smile on her face, she introduced herself.

Mervin released a radiant smile. 'I know you!'

Rabeka was amazed when Mervin being a 'coloured,' answered in the type of the Sesotho language spoken in Mamelodi, instead of in English.

She chuckled. 'How do you know me?'

Mervin giggled and struggled in a manner that seemed to say 'it's obvious'. She felt as if the gaze unleashed by his brown eyes was reaching the unknown depths of her heart, where it would find what she was hiding. Soon she caught her eyes wandering to his smooth forehead. When she suddenly turned her head, her eyes landed on Bobo from whom she noticed a frown of disapproval. Rabeka also sensed that other girls were looking at her frostily. Rabeka felt great to be the centre of attraction; she was aware that many girls in the group were eager to indicate to Mervin with coquettish behaviour that they were swooning for him.

12 In the afternoon Gooshkah was pleased that progress had been made. Most parts had single lines of dialogues; he would have to help the performers to 'live' their characters emotionally, to 'feel' their characters and not merely recite the lines. Other important roles such as Jahuza, his mother and the two members of 'The Cool Cats,' were firmly in place. The role of Jahuza's mother was given to Bobo, and Jahuza was Shu.

In the afternoon Rabeka and the two girls were ready to vie for the part of 'Vio-Vie'; it was the induction of the drug-pushers, the 'Cool-cats,' and each character had to take the following vow in front of a hooded drug lord:

The drug-lord is my shepherd,

I shall not want anything

He makes me sweat for sweet begger-all,

while he takes all the dough.

He lends me besides waters of courage,

He makes me lie down while I'm drugged;

Though he destroys my body and soul

I shan't complain, go away, or tell the police,

for he may get me the hit-men

*Yes though I walk through the valley of danger
And the shadow of the police,
I fear not evil for his powerful stuff
It comfort me and I'm a fearless tiger.*

*He prepares me a drugs-table in the presence of the police,
For some police are in his pocket;
My mother's cup of tears runs over
Surely poverty, sadness and misery,
Shall follow me all the days of my life,
If I'm lucky to live long.*

The competitors for the role had to wait outside so-that no-one could imitate anyone. They were asked to be creative. The two girls before Rabeka did their best: they recited it very well; they hoped the director would help them act the roles later.

Rabeka entered staggering and speaking like someone 'on a high', her lips loose, dripping saliva from the corners; at the part *He makes me sweat for nothing, while he takes all the dough*, she lifted and pushed an imaginary wheelbarrow; on the part *He makes me lie down while I'm drugged*, she lay down; she paused and acted most lines, interpreting every word with emotional depth. When she had finished and sat down Gooshkah turned to the performers. 'You are the judges. Who takes the part?'

'Reebbs!' they shouted unanimously.

Gooshkah raised his thumb. They group applauded.

13 From the rehearsals Rabeka strutted straight to KFC where aunt Mpule was waiting for her. After they had enjoyed their meal, Rabeka decided to bare her soul to her aunt. Over a week before when they'd had lunch with Pastor Jackie she had missed an opportunity to tell her about her niggling problem regarding Junior. But the issue that was at that moment singeing her soul more than anything was how she had felt when she met Mervin earlier that day.

Aunt Mpule smiled at Rabeka. 'Tell me Rabbeh, have you met any young man who makes your heart...?'

Aunt Mpule completed the sentence non-verbally by waving with her hands, suggesting the flipping of a butterfly's wings, ending with a mischievous smile.

Rabeka was taken by surprise by her aunt's question, which came out of the blue.

Rabeka giggled. 'No auntie! Not yet.' She chuckled. 'I'm so busy that I don't have time for guys.'

'I'm pleased to hear you saying that. Yes, your dream first, boys last!'

They laughed raucously.

'I was just kidding, Rabbeh!' said aunt Mpule, who quivered with laughter.

'Aunt Mpule, can I share with you something very personal?'

'You're most welcome Rabbeh!'

'Today I met a very attractive dude at the drama group. To be honest I felt very attracted to him. My knees became weak.' Rabeka smiled and slurped. 'He's slim, he has an attractive face with very sharp romantic eyes, and he has plaited his hair. When my eyes landed on him - his name is Mervin- my heart skipped a beat, and my imagination just ran amok...'

The eager listener, interrupted with a loud laughter.

'Oh aunt Mpule, why should I tell you all these...?'

'You're doing the right thing Rabbeh. Please tell me more.'

'I really felt bad; I felt cheap. I was embarrassed with how I had melted under his gaze.'

Aunt Mpule stretched her hand towards Rabeka and brushed her palm. 'Please don't feel guilty. Don't feel bad about how you felt. God has created you with such feelings towards the opposite sex. You are a normal girl. It's natural.'

Rabeka continued: 'I was never overtaken by such an intense feeling in my life. When I was at the technikon last year, I once warmed to a guy, but nothing emotional happened... Is it because I was protected by the company of other students who were members of the Students Christian Fellowship?'

Aunt Mpule smiled reassuringly. 'It's okay, Rabbeh. And remember: you aren't a perfect Christian. There's nothing wrong in being tempted. But my girl, don't allow to be swallowed by the jaws of the crocodile. Feelings can deceive anyone even the strongest Christian. If you've been deceived and you've taken wrong decisions, and you cry to God, He'll always forgive you.'

'Thank you auntie.'

'But you must also forgive yourself,' added aunt Mpule. 'And as for the young man, just treat him as a brother, as a friend and as a fellow artist. Rabbeh. I'll pray for you. Remember a prayer is like a safety belt; it will hold you safely.'

Rabeka nodded with tearful eyes. She was still a virgin. *How can I so easily forget that I still have such a treasure?* Rabeka chided herself.

'Listen Rabbeh. Don't be too serious with life. Sometimes you should laugh at yourself.'

'Really?'

'Blessed are they who laugh at themselves, for they shall never stop being entertained.'

Rabeka laughed and aunt Mpule joined her.

Rabeka had also told aunt Mpule about how she had quit working with Junior, whom she felt would not forgive her for dumping him.

'You know what you must do Rabbeh. Go the man and apologise to him,' said aunt Mpule after listening sympathetically.

'Thank you, auntie. I'll stop the life of running away or hiding, as if I'm owing him.'

'You can't hide behind any excuse.'

'Yes, auntie.'

'You know what excuses do? An excuse puts blame on something other than you.'

'I agree auntie,' said Rabeka softly.

'Avoiding to speak to him also makes you a bad Christian.'

Rabeka bowed her head, looking at her clasped hands.

'And remember one thing,' continued aunt Mpule, 'problems become smaller once you confront them. So don't procrastinate, Rabbeh! Speak to that guy as soon as possible!'

Again Rabeka was dewy-eyed. 'Thank you, auntie.'

'And where do you attend church in Mamelodi?'

Rabeka paused. 'I...I... to be honest auntie I've neglected the church. I kept postponing ...' Aunt Mpule smiled, pointing at her with a fore-finger. 'Don't neglect church. That's where you must recharge your battery.'

She smiled back. 'You're right, auntie!'

Before they parted, Rabeka hugged and kissed her aunt, very relieved, encouraged and strengthened to face the future.

That Wednesday afternoon at about 16h00 Junior drove to a small cafe in the street of Rabeka's aunt's house where he waited in a friend's car, waiting for Rabeka. Four hours later at 20h00 Rabeka had not yet arrived. Just before dusk he was waiting a house away from the house. A few minutes after 20h00 Junior reversed to Thabang's home and hooted. Thabang came out of the house and walked to a strange car.

She found Junior in the car; he spoke with a non-threatening voice. 'Do you know where she's staying?'

Thabang shrugged. 'I have no idea.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes. She's an adult. and if she doesn't want to tell me there's nothing I can do.'

Junior left without saying another word.

14 On Thursday Junior wanted to borrow a friend's car in order to wait near the entrance of Gooshkah's rehearsal place; but it was not possible for him to use the car as his friend used it in the morning to take some kids to the crèches. So Junior only got the car in the afternoon. He drove and waited opposite the entrance of Gooshkah's centre; the windows of the car were tinted; so no-one could see the occupant.

At the rehearsal centre Gooshkah had asked everyone including the cleaners to be vigilant about strangers and strange cars. Rabeka had told Gooshkah that Junior was hunting her. While Junior was waiting in the car, a cleaner became suspicious and went to tip off Gooshkah who immediately sent three group members to keep an eye on the strange car. Junior drove away when he saw the young men approaching.

Fifteen minutes before lunch on Friday Junior called Bathini and Spaza to his office. Spaza was Junior's nephew who joined the company after Rabeka had left.

'Guys I want to send you to Gooshkah's place and ask Reeb to come and see me.' Bathini and Spaza sat quietly, as Junior told them how he had tried to see Rabeka without any trace of success.

'I just want to ask her straight: "Reeb what did I do to deserve such a terrible thing?" And I want to know what good has she seen in Gooshka? Why does she think Gooshkah is better than me? I have planted and nourished a fruit tree, with so much sweat and another guy just comes and plucks the fruit!' So just go there and see if you

can convince her to come and see me after the rehearsals.'

'We'll do that bra Junior,' said Bathini, as she and Spaza walked out of his office.

Gooshkah was so busy with the performers that he worked through lunch. When his performers were at last released for lunch Spaza and Bathini returned empty-handed to Junior.

The group members were sitting on the lawn enjoying their lunch when a security guard came to them. A day after a strange car whose occupant was Junior was seen near Gooshkah's rehearsal centre, Gooshkah hired the services of two guards.

'Who is Reebees?' the guard asked the boys and girls.

'Who? Reeb? It's me!' answered Rabeka.

'Two people wanna see you,' said the guard, 'me tell them "Go away she too busy!" and *dey* walked away.'

Rabeka thanked the guard, He smiled, revealing tobacco-stained teeth as he walked back to the gate, where he joined his team-mate.

Back at Junior's office Bathini gave Junior the report. Bathini and Spaza were standing while Junior was seated behind his old office desk.

'The guards were very unfriendly; they are foreigners, and they speak a funny kind of English,' added Spaza.

Junior did not smile; he paused for a while looking blankly at an executive desk pad in front of him. He did not want to give up.

Bathini paced forward towards Junior. 'Bra Junior,' she spoke with a smirk. 'What did I say about the girl you were so impressed with?'

He stood up. 'What d'you want to say, Bat?' Junior pretended not to understand Bathini. Whenever Junior endearingly addressed her as 'Bat' she knew he wanted a favour or he wanted to soften or charm her in some way.

'What did I say about Reeb?' asked Bathini, her right arm on her waist. 'Didn't I say she's nice outside but a deep *skellum* inside?'

Junior folded his arms, moistened his lips and cast his gaze downward. He soon lifted up his head and forced a smile towards Bathini.

'Look at what she has done today,' continued Bathini. '*Hee-hee!* today you're holding the feathers; the bird is gone to Gooshkah!'

Junior pointed a finger towards Bathini. 'That's enough Bathini. Point noted!'

'Bra Junior,' said Bathini, 'if you thought I wasn't good enough as an assistant director, you should have asked a member who has been with the company for a long time, to help, not someone you know little about.'

'Okay, okay Bat,' said Junior softly. 'I've gambled, I've taken a risk and I did a bad job... but you cannot avoid taking a risk in this industry. I take full responsibility for whatever...!'

'Okay bra Junior.' Vindicated Bathini walked out of the office.

Junior and Spaza sat down as if by arrangement. Junior bowed forward, resting his forehead on his palm.

'Bra Junior, I know how you feel,' comforted Spaza.

'Thank you Spah,' said Junior. 'You know a black man's 'thank you' is a 'voetsek!' he said bitterly.

'Reeb's must know that a foot has no nose, it cannot smell; her foot will take her to a place where we shall meet her. Bra Junior I just feel we shouldn't give up.'

'I agree! But what can be done?'

'God sees her. God will punish her.'

'If God is too busy to punish her?'

'Then we take action!'

'What kind of action?'

Spaza paused. 'Why don't we send people to abduct her on the Friday a day before their drama perform on Saturday, and intimidate her, and tell her to stop working for Gooshkah?'

'No, I'm not for the idea of abduction. It's not safe. There's always a chance that we could be discovered. I don't want to go to jail. There's no sex and liquor in jail.' They laughed.

'What should we do then?'

'I don't know, but I'm certain we shall find a solution.'

During Saturday's rehearsal, Gooshkah decided to reshuffle some roles. 'As Director I take full responsibility for everything in the production,' he told them. He said Bobo should be a police woman arresting Jaluza during the opening scene; she would be the same police woman who would take him to the social workers after he had handed himself to the police. He explained that he felt that the part of Jaluza's mother needed someone who would interpret the part emotionally to his satisfaction.

'So this part I'll give to Reeb's,' said Gooshkah, causing Rabeka to gasp - he had taken her by surprise; 'because I'm satisfied she'll do it with the right sympathy, and make it credible to the viewer.'

Gooshkah looked in the direction of Patience. 'And you shall now be Vie-Vie. Okay?'

'Yes, bra Goosh!' said Patience.

15 As they went home Rabeka asked Patience if she knew of a church that had a short service of one hour, had nice up-beat singing, and nice people.

'I can't afford to attend a service of three hours. I'm busy with the script,' she justified.

Patience told her that if she could come to the Old Beer Hall near D5, she could find such a church. 'It's called House of Glory. My aunt attends one of that trendy churches which has members who dress well and some own BM's. When you are there ask for the church of Pastor Titus. My aunt's name is Doris. The service starts at ten.'

Rabeka awoke early and started reading and memorising the lines of her part in the script. She broke for one hour and helped Patience in preparing the Sunday meal: she peeled the potatoes, chopped cabbage and green beans and put the silver-ware pots at low-heat on the stove.

Rabeka went back to the script. She was directing herself, checking the script when she was in doubt. She was still rehearsing the scene where Jaluza returned home and embraced her mother emotionally, when Patience knocked on the bedroom door. 'Are you still going to church? It's ten minutes to go.'

Rabeka took a few seconds to 'come back' from acting her role to her real self.

She smiled and shook her head. 'I don't think I'll make it. I'm so much emotionally involved with the part and I don't want to lose what's inside me. You're a performer you know what I mean.'

Patience nodded.

'Give me another hour I'll be okay. I know I must go to church and recharge my batteries. Aunt Mpule reminded me last week. But today...' she shook her head. 'Okay Patty, I'll go to church next week.'

On Monday during rehearsals Rabeka, Patience and Bobo did their parts under Gooshkah's hawk-eye for the whole day. Gooshkah asked other performers to practice enunciation; many performers were 'swallowing' their words. Mervin kept the dancers' nimble legs busy until sweat-beads rolled down their foreheads. Gooshkah said the exercise would continue on Tuesday.

At Junior's rehearsal room on Wednesday morning, Spaza entered Junior's office. He smiled at his boss. 'Bra June, I've heard of something that can help us discipline Reebbs.'

'Yes, tell me!'

'Witch-craft.'

'Do I look like a witch?' asked Junior, a little perturbed.

'I'll explain bra June. This morning in the train I heard people talking about a witch-doctor who uses a needle to make your enemy sick, or kill him.'

'I wish I had known about this during apartheid days; I would have killed half of the security police and the army!' he chuckled. 'Is that true?'

'Yes!'

'How does it work?'

'The man in the train said the witch-doctor gives you some mixture to drink; a few minutes later he gives you water in a basin, and when you look you see your enemy. And the witch-doctor says to you "Stab him with this needle!" and when you stab, the water becomes a little bloody; that means the enemy is getting sick or he's dying.'

Junior kept quite for a few seconds, clearly digesting what Spaza had just told him.

'Sometimes we have to use the African Mafia.'

'Sure bra June!'

'Okay go and ask where you can get that man.'

At Gooshkah's place that Wednesday morning they started with rehearsals; Gooshkah told the members that they should work hard and be ready for Friday.

'On Friday we must do a run-through. Because on Saturday we must perform for the officials of the City Health,' he explained.

The aim was to polish the musical part towards the end of the play, he went on to explain, where the main character, Jaluza joins a dance group and they teach him how to harness his youthful energy positively. Gooshkah also asked the group members to polish their lines by recalling them by themselves or aiding others.

The cast of Gooshkah's group worked very hard during the second week of rehearsals. On Thursday the fastidious director was still yelling at some sloppy performers. He threatened that those who lowered the standard would be replaced by others who would do double and triple roles.

'Remember,' Gooshkah dismounted the director's chair and emphasised with two hands, 'the mayor and top officials of the City Health will be there; our critics will be watching every move, every action and every word, and the media!'

At Junior's rehearsal space, that Thursday morning as Junior was busy making a diary entry in his executive pad, Spaza knocked at the door.

Junior raised his slightly contorted forehead, looking at the door. 'Come in!'

Spaza entered.

Junior smiled and raised his forefingers, while other fingers were folded. 'What can I do for you, Spah?' He gestured towards an empty chair and Spaza sat. Then raised his arms, clasped his fingers, put his elbows on the table, leaned on them and looked into Junior's eyes with concentration.

Spaza stretched his legs and leaned on the back of the chair, sighed and tightly grasped his fingers.

'Bra Junior, I found the man who can help discipline Reebbs,' said Spaza.

Junior flashed a smile. 'Really? So soon?'

'Yes, bra June! The gods are on our side. The man says we must come on Saturday. He's a Grigamba.'

'How much does he want?'

'Two thousand rand.'

16 Friday, the second week of rehearsals, Gooshkah said he was pleased with progress, although there was still room for improvement. He insisted that Mervin and Bobo as the commanders of dance had to be satisfied that a high standard was maintained.

In the afternoon the dance members were ready waiting for a cue. Bobo and Mervin sat on two chairs in front of the stage, with papers and pencils. They meant business, and they were not going to smile on anyone rendering mediocrity.

The Zulu dance started first. Wearing a no-nonsense facial expression the male drummer pounded the huge drum as if he intended to tear it apart; the warriors entered kicking, pushing, spearing, and stamping on the imaginary enemy, while the women, all beads and thighs, cheered and excited their men with waist-breaking dancing. Satisfied, Bobo smiled, but added there would always room for improvement.

It was time for modern dance. Mervin bowed with a raised head and wide eyes, facing the group of dancers. He snapped his fingers. 'Okay guys everything must be sharp-shoot and tidy! No-one must miss by the fraction on a second!'

At the whistle, the group began to dance to a rap song on the CD player. Suddenly Bobo bowed and leaned on Mervin's thigh. And Mervin perhaps without thinking rested his hand on Bobo's shoulder. What had accidentally become a romantic posture perturbed most of the other girls, who were tempted to hiss at smiling and thrilled Bobo. It was the

first time that Rabeka had seen Bobo's glowing smile.

The day well-spent, it was time to go to their homes. Rabeka, Patience and Mashadi were not part of the dancers, so they were ready to go home. As they ambled out of the yard Mervin saw them. He walked briskly and overtook them. Bobo was busy checking the dance costumes.

Mervin grabbed Rabeka by the hand, separated her from the two girls, and slowed down her pace to match his.

With an amorous smile, he laughed in a manner he thought was appealing, licked his upper lip and squeezed Rabeka's hand. 'Reebs, you're the first girl to play hard to get.'

'How did I play hard to get?' asked Rabeka.

'Yesterday I winked and smiled at you twice and you just looked in the opposite direction.'

Rabeka chuckled. 'What about the one who was leaning on your thigh?'

'Who Bobo? I didn't feel anything. I want you.'

'You won't get me!'

'Why?'

'I'm not a cheap girl. Most of the girls here are crazy about you.'

'How do you know?'

'I heard them speaking about you in the showers. The very first day when you danced I heard some girls whispering: "Ooh he's so sexy!". Even now when Bobo leaned on your thigh they were bursting with jealousy.'

'It's no big deal for me, I'm used to that. The girl who will be fortunate to land in my arms is you.'

'You won't get me Mervin. I'm very expensive! And I can't mess my life with a playboy.'

'I pity you, Reebs,' said Mervin very confidently, 'You don't know what you are missing.'

'Missing what?'

He caressed her waist tenderly and she restrained his hand, 'It'll be exciting,' whispered Mervin, 'for a great dancer's legs to get between the actress' thighs. He licked his lips amorously, 'you know what I mean.'

Rabeka smacked Mervin's arm. 'Sies Mervin! I'm not your type!' Rabeka chased Mervin who ran away roaring with laughter.

'Ag you're a stingy girl,' cried Mervin, 'but you don't know what you're missing!'

As Rabeka had faced the rehearsal rooms, she could see Bobo approaching, giving her a real 'dirty' look.

On Saturday at 09h00, two hours before the officials came to see the play, the cast, all in track suits first stretched their limbs, and Sbu lead them in physical exercises which most found a bit gruelling. As they relaxed forty-five minutes later, Rabeka, delegated by Gooshkah, led the 'Betty's-brown-bitter-butter' lip exercises. For enunciation she made them do: 'She sells sea-shells along the sea-shore.' Merry laughter filled the room as some of them kept saying: 'She shells she-cells along the she-sore.'

After vocal exercises Gooshkah was ready. He said his duty was to ensure that the play was polished, tightened, trimmed and smoothed before the big men and women arrived. Bobo and Mervin asked for about ten minutes for dance. The high school

students of Bobo's former school had been invited to be the audience; they had come with two teachers.

At 11h00 the two women and one guy from City Health were seated in front next to Gooshkah, pens and notebooks in their hands, to jot down whatever was worth recording.

In a moment lights in the room were switched off and stage lights faded on. Sbu as Jaluza entered running and jumped over a fence into a yard, and hurried to hide behind a rubbish bin; within seconds he had entered his mother's house; he was still breathing heavily, looking in all directions. Rabeka in the role of his mother was ironing some clothes.

'Jalu, what's happening?' she inquired.

Jaluza was still breathing heavily. 'The police! They are looking for me!'

'What have you done?'

'I was with Mpho and my friends in a car. When we saw a police road-block he took a paper-bag from the boot of the car...'

'The boot of a stolen car? What was in the paper bag? Drugs? Jalu, just stop criminal activities and go back to school, my boy!'

There was a knock at the door.

'Who's there?' asked Jaluza's mother.

'Police! Open!'

Moments later a policeman and a policewoman left the place sandwiching Jaluza between them.

'And please keep him until the drugs get out of his head!' shouted Jaluza's mother. Loud applause punctuated the end of the opening scene. Rabeka was confident that they had made an impressive opening. She was delighted to see the officials scribbling some notes.

The play raced towards the end: Gooshkah had designed it to be pacey so-that the target audience, the youth, should not be bored. The youthful

audience had a lot of fun, laughing, applauding, cheering, standing and stomping and whistling all the way until the last scene- the one Rabeka had been waiting for.

In the last scene Rabeka as Jaluza's mother was humming a hymn, sweeping the room.

There was a knock at the door. 'Come in!' responded Mother.

Jaluza shuffled into the room, his right arm in plaster. Mother was stunned.

'Mamma, I have come back home,' whispered tearful Jaluza.

Mother stood rooted.

'I...I nearly died!' said Jaluza. 'Three of my friends-in-drugs are dead! Vie-Vie the only girl in our group has broken her spine. She will use a wheel-chair for life. We were driving fast, rushing to a party organized by the Godfather, our Drug-boss. We had all taken the take-me-to-heaven-quickly drug and we thought we were very brave. We crossed a red robot and a truck crashed into our car, killing two of us, throwing me out while Vie-Vie was trapped inside -bleeding and screaming. An ambulance rushed me and Vie-Vie to hospital'.

Mother began to sob.

'I have come back home, mamma,' said Jaluza. 'I know you said I should come back to this house, only when I'm a sweet obedient boy. I won't do any *kak*

any more. I've come back to you mamma. I'll try to be your sweet obedient son. I don't want to die young because I think I'm cool. I'm going to hand myself to the police. Please give me the last chance, mamma!

With open arms ready to embrace, Mother shuffled slowly towards Jaluza who moved closer. Suddenly Mother bent, grimacing, touching her right shoulder; she staggered and was about to fall heavily on her knees, when Jaluza embraced and help to absorb the shock that could have injured her knees. Mother sat up, held her right shoulder and began to groan. Gooshkah stood up, his face telling a story of shock.

'Joo mma-wee! A terrible pain on my shoulder!' said Mother, grimacing. The audience applauded loudly. Gooshkah leapt towards the performers; when he had arrived at the spot, he raised his hands. 'No, it's not part of the script! And she isn't improvising anything! Something has gone horribly wrong here!'

Rabeka felt a sharp pain spreading in her spine; she also felt as if something like a needle was piercing her breast. Gooshkah squatted beside her and began to massage where the shoulder joined the spine. Numb, Rabeka lay on her left side. Patience covered her with a sheet. Rabeka gasped for breath and Patience did mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

That Saturday evening, Thabang, accompanied by her boy-friend who owned a car, arrived at Patience's home. Patience had phoned her. She found Rabeka in the lounge in the company of Gooshkah, Mervin, Sbu and the officials of the city health; she was lying on a long couch, a blanket covering her chest. When the other people realised Thabang was Rabeka's relative, they apologised and left. Gooshkah wished her a speedy recovery and said he hoped she would be ready for rehearsals on Monday.

Rabeka told Thabang all what happened.

'RB, how do you feel now?' asked concerned Thabang.

'It's better. I've not recovered completely,' said Rabeka softly. 'The doctor gave me an injection and some pain-killers, and something to massage.'

Thabang began to massage Rabeka's shoulder - the part where the neck meets the shoulder.

'The pain gets worse the moment I move my shoulder,' Rabeka told Thabang.

'You'll be okay RB,' comforted Thabang. 'Mamma says I should come and fetch you; she says it's not right that we should leave you alone here when you're sick; she says you must recover at home. That's why I asked my boy-friend to take me here.'

Her boyfriend was waiting in the car near the gate of Patience's house.

Thabang radiated a mischievous smile. 'I hope Junior hasn't bewitched you!'

Rabeka laughed aloud but stifled her laugh with her left hand, her right hand touching her shoulder. She grimaced.

'I'll go to church tomorrow,' said Rabeka, 'to be prayed for.'

'If God doesn't charge even a cent, why can't you try Him?' agreed Thabang.

On Sunday she woke up early as she had planned to go to church. She lent a hand where she could regarding preparations for the Sunday meal. The family had complemented her for the way she boiled and later fried her potatoes with their jackets which were peeled away when eaten; she also cooked rice which she often mixed with peas and lentils. She assured Thabang that she would cook custard when she came back from church.

On her way to the taxi route she passed an old church built with stones, which she always bypassed. The hymn accompanied by a key-board, was to her ears, so refreshingly new that she paused and looked at the church. The hymn in Southern Sotho said: 'Wash me, clean me so-that I should be beautiful.' She had not heard the hymn in a long time. But she was on her way to a trendy, glamorous church, where people dressed nicely and the music was up-beat, the one attended by Patience's aunt.

Suddenly she was overtaken by a strange urge to go into the old church; she respected her instinct and walked into the yard. As she stepped in, looking sideways, she realised she had made a big mistake; she had not covered her head with a doek; she touched her head, really feeling out of place. The urge not to sit in the last row of the women's side got stronger. But a woman elder, realising her predicament walked to her and gave her a doek to cover her hair.

At the end of the hymn it was time for announcements. The same elder who had given her the doek read the announcements. She ended by saying those who needed healing should come before an elder from another branch who had 'a gift for healing'. Rabeka thought that the elder might be a teacher, a nurse, or someone important during working hours. Scores of people, mostly women and girls, rose from their seats and walked to the space between the first row and the pulpit.

Rabeka walked and joined the healing row right at the end. She saw that most of the people being prayed for falling, with women covered with table cloths from their waists, for decency's sake. She knew that this often happened when people were 'slain by the spirit.' Three elders stood behind every person being prayed for so-that when he fell he should land in their arms. The man lay his hands on Rabeka's shoulders, and she felt a mild electric shock going down her spine; she also fell backwards.

After the church service Rabeka handed the doek back to the same elder who had given it to her.

The elder smiled at her. 'I hope we aren't seeing for the last time.'

'No ma'm, I'll come again. What church is this?'

'The short name is 'Evangelical.''

'I was on my way to the House of Glory.'

'The Pastor of that church is the son of the pastor here.'

17 One Monday morning Gooshkah arrived an hour early. He had asked Mervin and Rabeka to come early so-that they could plan for the day. When they arrived, they prepared hot chocolate and sipped from the paper cups as they walked to Gooshkah's office. He had planned to discuss how dialogue towards the end of the play could be interspersed with dancing and movement, positioning and grouping of the performers. Gooshkah directed a smile at Rabeka as she sat down beside Mervin. 'Are you okay Reeb?' 'Reeb?'

'I'm tip-top bra Gooshkah. They prayed for me at the church yesterday.'

Gooshkah sipped from a steaming mug. 'I hope Junior hasn't bewitched you!'

They burst with laughter.

Gooshkah opened his A4 size executive desk diary while Mervin and Rabeka had their pocket diaries. The dates in their diaries indicated it was 6th June. Gooshkah was beginning to have the director's opening night anxiety. 'We are left with only four days!' he whistled with wonder.

The reality that they would be performing on the fifth day hit them like cold water on a face of a sleepy person.

Mervin performed a dance sequence and paused while Rabeka read the line and paused, with Gooshkah directing.

As Gooshkah's direction took time, more group members arrived and whiled away time by chatting and drinking coffee. Arriving with two other girls, Bobo found Sbu and Patience and three other members having tea and coffee.

Bobo was in no amicable mood. 'Where's Mashadi?' she demanded.

'Here am I' said Mashadi innocently, emerging from the ladies' toilet.

A scowl on her face, Bobo took two wide steps towards Mashadi. '*Hei wena skeberesh!* (Hey you, harlot) I heard you had visited Mervin last night. What were you doing with him in his backroom?'

Before tongue-tied Mashadi could utter a word, a punch fell on her nose; Mashadi threw a klap which Bobo blocked with her tough arm. Bobo pulled her down by her neck and hit her with her right knee; in an instant Mashadi's nose bled. Sbu broke the fighting girls apart, while Patience ran to Gooshkah's office.

Bobo flexed her biceps, and waved her fists. 'Listen here all you girls. Mervin is mine...he loves me; so keep your hands off him!'

Two girls - the youngest in the dance troupe, both aged 14, one very dark, another light-complexioned, entered the room pushing and pulling one another.

'Mervin is mine!' light-complexioned pouted.

Dark-complexioned slapped her face. 'He's mine!'

'He slept with me, not you!' insisted light-complexioned.

Bobo waved her index finger at the girls. 'All you loose panties, I'll get you one-by-one! Reeb is next! She'll get these,' she looked at her fists, 'porridge-breakers of mine! *Sies!* I wish she had died in hospital so-that no-one should be a fly in my glass of cream!'

At that moment Patience entered followed by Gooshkah, Mervin and Rabeka.

'They are fighting over Mervin!' Patience told them.

'Over me? Why?' asked Mervin.

'Yes, yes!' said light complexioned girl.

Gooshkah clapped his hands. 'Order! Order!'

Gooshkah paused, glancing at all the cast members who were standing around him. They were more than the original number; because of the performance the following Saturday, school-going members had asked for special permission from their schools, which cooperated because it was felt that the anti-drug project was relevant.

Gooshkah gestured towards Sbu. 'You, Reebbs and Patience, as from today you form a disciplinary committee. I have no time to listen to all this nonsense. My mind is on the production; I want to present something out of this world on Saturday! For your own good! The three of you, come to my office for a brief discussion. The rest just be busy. Please guys! You must know that in this industry you always have to work towards perfection.'

Fifteen minutes later Sbu, Patience and Rabeka began to interview the group members; Reebbs was the chairperson of the committee. Bobo was the last person they planned to grill. When it was time to speak to the light-complexioned girl, Reebbs suggested that Sbu should be excused. 'This is very sensitive because we are going to speak about womanhood,' justified Rabeka.

Sbu cooperated.

Reebbs also suggested that she alone should speak to the girl. She whispered to Patience : 'I also want you to go. I don't want the girl to feel intimidated; I want to be alone with her, and I'll promise her that I won't tell anyone.'

Patience agreed.

Rabeka smiled at the girl. 'By the way, what's your name?'

'Mpho,' responded the girl.

'Great! Mpho means a gift. All right?'

'Yes, sis-Reebbs.'

'When you had a fight with that girl...' said Rabeka, 'what's her name?'

'Nkele.'

'Okay. When you had a fight with Nkele you said Mervin has slept with you. Can you tell me what really happened?'

Mpho began to lick and to nibble at her little finger. A smile had disappeared from her face and she was bashful, casting her eyes downwards.

'Please tell me, Mpho. I promise you Mpho, I won't tell anyone,' Rabeka cajoled. Rabeka waited patiently. Mpho had continued to lick her finger, playing with her foot as if drawing something with her toe inside her shoes.

'Mpho don't be shy. Look at me in the eyes. You've nothing to hide. You're a sweet little girl. Your mother taught you how to smile. You're beautiful. You're a gift to this group.'

Rabeka gave the most radiant smile. 'Now tell me what really happened, Mpho!' Rabeka's tone had become more authoritative but was still charming.

Mpho smiled; but it faded, her face beginning to wear a serious look. 'Last week I went o Mervin's room; he kissed me and touched my breasts and his... his thing... his penis touched my buttocks.'

'Did he put it inside your...?'

'No! His thing touched my thighs. He said next time he'll put it inside...'

'Did he say that?'

'Yes!'

'So, you're still a virgin?'

'Yes!'

Rabeka gave her a hug, and patted her back.

'But girls in my class,' continued Mpho, 'are laughing at me, when I tell them I've never had sex.'

'Let them laugh! You've nothing to be ashamed of. They've lost a lot. You've lost nothing.'

Mpho nodded.

'They've trash, you've a gift and a treasure!' continued Rabeka. 'Keep up the standard Mpho!'

Mpho gave Rabeka the brightest smile.

Rabeka kissed Mpho on her left cheek, and held her by the hand, signalling it was the end of the interview, leading her out of the room. 'I'm also a virgin.'

Mpho's merry laughter burst from her lips.

Mervin and Bobo were the last to be interviewed.

In the afternoon the disciplinary committee was ready and they held a meeting with Gooshkah. They presented their findings: Three girls aged 18 have admitted to sleeping with Mervin at his backroom; it appeared most girls had a fantasy to sleep with Mervin, and that included Bobo. Mpho admitted that she did not in fact sleep with Mervin, and she said he intends to bed her in future.

To Gooshkah's question: *What are your recommendations?* The committee responded: Bobo and Mervin should be warned strongly and be threatened with suspension and even expulsion, and the girls should be told to concentrate on what they had come to achieve. Bobo was the first to face the committee; Gooshkah warned her, adding that she might be suspended in future.

It was Mervin turn to appear before the committee.

'Merve,' Gooshkah addressed him endearingly, 'I'm disappointed with you.'

'What have I done bra Goosh?'

'Let me tell you straight! Stay away from the girls below 16 years. I'm telling you, you are knocking at the prison door! If parents of the girls investigate through the child welfare society, we cannot cover your back sonny! You'll go to jail. Maybe you'll teach dance in jail. The worst thing that could happen to you because you're a handsome boy, is to be sodomised by sex-hungry prisoners. Is that what you're looking forward to?'

'No ways! But these girl are just fabricating stories, bra Goosh!'

Gooshkah smiled at Mervin. 'Well we shall have to refer the matter to the social workers and the police child protection unit. They are experts. And they know how to extract truth out of a suspect.'

Mervin sat quietly, thoughtfully gripping his left fore-finger with his teeth. Gooshkah smiled at him. 'Merve, what you you got to say?'

'I'm sorry bra Goosh!'

'Are you promising to behave in future?'

'Yes, bra Goosh!'

'You can go!'

Rabeka pitied humbled Mervin. She had never seen him looking that way. She felt like

giving him a good hug. *I'm glad*, she thought, *that although he had charmed me, , I never became his one of Mervin's conquests and statistics.*

Rabeka heaved a sigh. 'I wish we can invite my mentor, Mr Matlamela,' she said, a few seconds after Mervin had walked out of the office. 'He has a very interesting project in Limpopo; he calls it the 'Realise Your Dream. He's coaching young people on how to realise their dreams.'

'That's wonderful, Reebbs!' appreciated Gooshkah. 'You must teach the group after the performance.'

'I will bra Gooshkah!'

'Girls, you're not here for boys! Boys, you're not here for girls.' Gooshkah spoke to the group in the rehearsal room. 'You're all here for one thing. Empowerment; so please be focussed on one thing.'

He told the group that because they had lost a day, in the form of time for rehearsals, they would have to work two extra hours during the next four days.

Four days were like four hours, to the hard-working group. There was no need for Gooshkah to yell at any performer. Bobo and Mervin, a little subdued, squeezed every drop of excellence out of the production. Even during lunch the performers ate as they talked about nothing but theatre; there was no more room or moment for idle prating. They were always in hurry to finish their lunch so that they should get a moment to polish a part here and there.

That Friday they did two dress rehearsals, one in the morning and another one in the afternoon. He released them as early as 14h00, saying they should go to their homes and have a good rest. He told them to report at the gate of the municipal offices in Mamelodi at 07h00 on Saturday morning; from there a mini-bus would take them to Central Sports Ground at 08h00.

18 Wearing yellow T-shirts inscribed in blue on the front: 'Drugs Don't Pay - a drama directed by Gooshkah Baloi,' the cast stomped about and sang in front of the municipal offices. Their two-hour patience paid off when they saw a double-decker bus with an open top turning at the robot about 100 yards away. In front and behind the bus, Metropolice cars flickered blue lights. Waving with gusto at the front of the top of the bus was the Mayoress, the Mayoral Committee and top officials.

Well-known rap artist Kabelo Mabulana was in their midst, singing along to a dubbed track of a song that had made him famous, '*Ke Lepantsola for life*.' In an instant, Kabelo's fans and other curious onlookers arrived in tens and soon hundreds were standing around the bus waving at their idol. The bus was not there to stay or waste time; the moment it stopped, a city health official beckoned Gooshkah over:

'Gooshkah!' he shouted, 'Please come and join us with your group!' Feeling greatly honoured, the cast boarded the bus and rushed up the stairs to the open top, where they were given leaflets of the campaign to throw down to the people passing or following the bus.

As the bus cruised into the township, throwing down leaflets tied to balloons, biscuits and sweets, Kabelo took the megaphone. '*Hola, holaa!!* Young people of Mamelodi. This is Kabelo Mabulana in person! I've come to tell you that I love, and I wanna tell you that drugs don't pay. For five years I lived a life of drugs as an artist thinking that they would make me a great artist! I thought I was cool, but I later realised I would be cool in the coffin. So I stopped taking drugs, and I wanna tell you that since I kicked the drug habit I'm a better musician, winning more awards; and I'm very healthy. Young people, you can be like me, don't do drugs! Drugs don't pay!!'

Kabelo's ecstatic fans swelled the numbers to thousands following the bus. Two hours later the bus arrived at the Central Sports grounds. Some parts of the main street had been cordoned off and were used exclusively by those getting into and out of the venue. Several police sedans and vans were parked in front of the entrance. Over a hundred policemen and police-women milled around, the commanding officers speaking with cell-phones. Traffic cars kept escorting VIP cars to a special parking area.

The dignitaries included two Members of the Executive Provincial Council for Health and Social Development and their top officials. As Rabeka walked out of the bus, still thriving on the aura, glamour and glitz of the campaign atop the magnificent bus, her cell-phone rang. It was aunt Mpule inquiring: 'How's everything there?'

'When we arrived we were welcomed by the drum majorettes... I felt so great aunt Mpule...I cannot hear you there's so much noise...speak to you later bye!'

Walking past a massive tent for the audience, the cast was lead to two tents behind the stage in which they would put their belongings and change into costumes. Among several small tents were those used by the exhibitors displaying leaflets and brochures of their organisations. The organisations for women's self-help projects also displayed colourful beads and other artifacts. Throngs of people moved about the stalls in various tents. Some local up-and-coming bands were dishing out music while others waited in the queue to perform later.

Rabeka's cell-phone rang. She could read 'bra TM' on the screen, and she pressed and answering button.

'I'm here with members of the 'Realise Your Dream project,' said TM, 'what's happening?'

Rabeka could hear voices of the boys and girls from her village!

'It's a great day! There are many people; thousands of high schools students have attended the event; let me look at the programme... Three young people have already recited anti-drugs poems. The Mayor and the MEC for Social Development have already spoken about the need for the young people to utilise their energy positively; they are promising to create more facilities and to increase staff for the youth development, and *uhm...*; we are waiting for Kabelo to come the stage, and we'll perform immediately after him... Speak to you later bra T, Kabelo is performing!'

Kabelo started off with the audience favourite, '*Ke Lepantsola for life*.' Suddenly the orderly audience rose from their seats and surged towards the stage, clapping hands. After rendering a few more songs which he had adapted to the anti-drug message, Kabelo gave a moral talk, telling young people that the secret of kicking the drug habit for ever was accepting Jesus.

There were a few boos from those who never associated the star with Jesus, but most people listened attentively. As Kabelo presented the last songs, Gooshkah's group, the only drama group, approached the back of the stage, ready to present 'Drugs Don't Pay.' They had been requested to trim the play to only 12 minutes. The reason given was that 30 minutes would be too long for an outdoor audience. The City Health officials had persuaded Gooshkah whose cast was upset by the cut, to perform the whole play during some of their future indoor events.

With very small microphones, invisible to the audience, attached to their clothes, Sbu and Rabeka, performed the opening scene with gusto and high pace. The audience who had mobbed the stage were mesmerised; when Bobo as a policewoman and her male colleague had ferreted out and hand-cuffed drug-pushing Jaluza the audience gave lusty cheers, some saying to Jaluza: 'Ya, drugs don't pay!'

Gooshkah, as narrator, briefly told them what would happen until the scene when Jaluza was compelled to come home. Some people were moved to tears as Jaluza entered his mother's house, his hand covered in Plaster of Paris, said: '*Ag shem!*' The closing scene when Jaluza - after he had handed himself to the police - was part of the dance troupe he had joined, had the audience celebrating how good had ultimately defeated evil.

While the audience was still enthralled by the breath-taking dance sequence, they saw Jaluza suddenly discontinuing his dancing and stretching his arms sideways; other cast member also stretched their arms sideways and created a chain; they all bowed before the audience who would not accept that the play had come an end. One person hollered: 'We want more dance!' and others joined her.

Gooshkah had no choice but to ask the dancers to give the audience what they had requested. When they bowed again the audience gave them a standing ovation. Rabeka saw the Mayoress, the MEC and other dignitaries applauding and waving. The photo-journalists who had been taking photos waited at the tent that was used by the cast. They made appointments to interview Gooshkah. They took pictures of Gooshkah alone and with the cast and with Rabeka and Sbu. Well-wishers flocked to the tent where they congratulated especially Rabeka and Jaluza.

Elated Gooshkah, his teeth showing, elevated himself on a chair. 'Boys and girls you've made me proud. Well-done!'

They applauded.

'But,' added Gooshkah, 'There's still room for improvement. So I give you eight out of ten!'

They applauded again. Someone entered the tent and beckoned at Gooshkah who immediately went out.

The cast shuffled closer to the stage where people crowded around it, listening to the youth orchestra. Rabeka felt someone tapping her shoulder. It was Gooshkah. 'The Mayoress would like to see us: you, me and Sbu.'

Rabeka held her breath as they stepped towards the petite Mayoress, sandwiched between two members of her 'cabinet.' Gooshkah gestured that Rabeka should be the first to shake hands; she was followed by Jaluza and finally Gooshkah.

The smiling Mayoress, focussed on Gooshkah. 'Thank you for a wonderful piece of drama,' her glance shifted to Jaluza. 'Well-done young man.'

Her Worship grabbed Rabeka by her hand. 'Young lady, you've a great future as an actress.'

Rabeka did not know how to address the Mayoress. 'Thank you ma'm!'

'Keep it up!' concluded the Mayoress.

They posed for a photo taken by the city's communications department. A photojournalist from the Mamelodi Sun, who was waiting as the Mayoress was congratulating Gooshkah and his guys took a few shots.

Patience arrived at the scene and told Gooshkah that some journalists were waiting for him at the tent. Before Gooshkah could take a single step someone touched his shoulder; requesting his cell-phone numbers; he said he was the manager in the office of the MEC for Health; as he was busy giving the numbers someone sidled towards him.

The man standing in front of Gooshkah, introduced himself as Gerrie Louw, headmaster of the Derdepoort High School. 'Thank you for a wonderful play.'

'Thank you, sir,' responded Gooshkah.

'I like the message, and you guys are presenting it in an entertaining manner.'

Gooshkah nodded with a smile.

'I want you to come to my school. My school is troublesome. The students are rude, they take drugs and they carry guns. Last week a female teacher was beaten up by some students. Teachers are running away from my school. I think your play has a message that could change those who take drugs and those who sell them.'

'Let's make an appointment and discuss, sir,' said Gooshkah.

At the tent some photographers took pictures of Sbu and Rabeka separately and together and later with Gooshkah; the journalists took Gooshkah's particulars and promised to call him for a short telephone interview. After the meal the performers went to listen to other bands playing at the stage. Hours later it was time to go home and a microbus waited to deliver the performers to their homes.

Before they boarded the microbus Gooshkah told them to come to the rehearsal rooms on Wednesday, not for rehearsals but for their money. As they got into the microbus he gave each a bear-hug; when it was Rabeka's turn he held her arm and pulled her to his right, suggesting that he wanted to tell her something.

Gooshkah at last gave Rabeka a tight embrace, and a kiss aiming at her lips; but she swung her neck, giving him her tender cheek to contend with. Rabeka felt very uncomfortable to be hugged in that fashion; no boy or man had ever embraced her so

intimately, but told herself not to get offended over a thing that might have happened accidentally, or out of sheer excitement.

19 That Sunday, Rabeka felt she had overslept, but she felt her body needed a lot of rest; she wondered what aunt Mpule would think of her for missing yet another opportunity to recharge her battery.

On Monday, she busied herself with a lot of chores for which she had not had time when she was busy rehearsing in preparation for the Drug Day.

On Tuesday in the afternoon she relaxed with a copy of 'Top 100 Achievers'; she re-read the story recording sharks, telling herself that she hoped TM and the drama group were making progress in their rehearsals. She came across a line she felt she was reading for the first time: *it requires a lot of strength and character to survive...*

The cast went to the rehearsal rooms on Wednesday. Gooshkah told them the cheques from City Health would be ready by Wednesday the following week. As the group members shuffled out of the rehearsal room towards the gate Gooshkah called Rabeka.

'Let's go to my office,' said Gooshkah.

He grasped her hand and began to knead it. Rabeka stiffened her arm and extricated her hand with a coyness that aroused his predatory instinct. He stood behind his desk, while she leaned on the chair with her arms.

He smiled. 'You can come on Tuesday.'

'You told us that we should come on Wednesday. Why should I come on Tuesday bra Goosh?'

He liked to hear her addressing him like that. 'I want you to help me,' said Gooshkah.

'Some administrative duties are behind because I had concentrated on the production.

Remember you are a leader of the committee. Sbu will also be around.'

Rabeka was relieved to hear that Sbu would also be there.

On Tuesday just after 11h30 Rabeka walked into Gooshkah's centre; she found him standing at the door of the waiting-filing room adjacent to his office. She sensed he was the only person at the office. She wondered if he would want to embrace her the way he had the previous week. *If he tries that, I'll restrain him*, she thought. As if he had read her mind he greeted her with a hand-shake. But after he had shaken her hand, he scratched her palm twice with his index finger.

She gave half a smile, which faded in an instant. 'Where is Sbu. Didn't you say...?'

'He has a little problem, but it's no big deal,' he responded, waving his right hand.

'Anyway you can do the job alone; the assignment is enough for one person. It won't take you more than two hours. Come! I'll show you.'

He gestured that she should enter the room first. He showed her a heap of files on the tables which he said should be filed into the four-drawer steel filing cabinets.

He also showed her a file cover containing some letters. 'These letters are from prospective donors and sponsors. You must make entries into this notebook according to these columns: Date received, Organisations, Contact person, and Contact details. In the last column of the date of reply you can leave it blank. Is everything clear?'

'Yes, sir!'

'Mojah, mojah!'

She was thirty-minutes into the job when he re-entered the room. She was standing in front of the filing cabinet inserting the files in to alphabetical order. He sneaked closer to her. She was aware of his presence but she minded her business. He pussy-footed towards her; she turned towards him; he smiled at her; she continued with filing.

He walked behind her, brushing her shoulder blades with his chest and her buttocks with his pubic area. She turned towards him, wanting to raise an objection, but her tongue seemed to have stuck on her palates. She decided that every kind of occupation had its own challenges. So she could not to be offended.

Gooshkah patted her shoulder. 'It was just a test of concentration.'

She did not know what to say.

He touched her hand with his index finger. 'I want to organise something to chow at about 13h00. What's your favourite juice?'

'Mango.'

He walked out of the room. *'Mojah, mojah!'*

Two hours later she had finished her task and he invited her for lunch in his office. When she entered his office her nose was hit by an aroma of fried chicken.

His cellphone rang and he answered it; hers also rang and she went out of the office to answer it.

It was TM. 'And how are you realising your dream?'

Rabeka chuckled. 'It's getting better!'

'Have you met any giants in the valley?'

'Not yet, but I can promise you: when time comes for me to meet the giants I'm not going to turn back.'

'That's the mentality and speech of a champion!'

'Thanks bra T!'

'I'm re-reading that article in the Top 100 Achievers' magazine; I came across another line I'm going to include in the script.'

'What is it?' curios Rabeka wanted to know.

'I'm looking at it now; it says: *it requires a lot of strength and character to survive...*'

Rabeka laughed aloud.

'Why are you laughing?' inquired TM.

'Because it was the line that I also noticed when I re-read the article a few days ago.'

'Well let's just say 'great minds think alike.'

Rabeka chuckled.

'And how was the drug day?' inquired TM.

'It was fantastic, bra T! Can you call me after an hour? I'm still consulting my boss.'

Gooshkah gave her a fiver pack and a mango juice 'That's yours.'

She was reminded of their first meeting when he recruited her. 'Thanks bra Goosh.'

They began to eat. She looked around the office. 'Sbu should have been here. What's the problem?'

'He says he has a stomach ache. He could be having a lot of bile, you know.'

They continued to eat.

Again he was particularly impressed with her addressing him with the shorter and endearing *bra Goosh* which he felt left a door open for him to be 'naughty,' should an opportunity avail itself. He felt morally good about himself because he was perhaps the only theatre producer who did not 'slaughter the lambs' like Junior, Mawaza, and many others who felt that bedding the girls in their companies was okay, and was a way of 'thanking' themselves in a career that was not most of the time, financially rewarding. She had a feeling that he was not sober, although her sense of smell could not ascertain anything. He came across to her as very jovial.

He emitted a radiant smile. 'You must be feeling good about yourself.'

'Of course, bra Goosh! I'm the only Reebs in the world!'

He finished eating before her and opened his carton of juice and started sipping. He had no idea what had gotten into his mind when out of the blue he had decided to embrace and to kiss Rabeka on the day of the Drug Day.

He caused a pen to fall from the desk and bent to pick it up; his eyes had an opportunity to sneak past her legs. When he had pulled himself back above the table, he gripped her legs with his; she pulled them out.

'Bra Gooshkah, I'm not impressed with what you've just done,' she said with politeness.

'Com'on don't be stiff Reebs. I'm just appreciating your pair of sexy legs.'

'But I don't like the way you show your appreciation.'

He giggled.

Again she decided that every kind of occupation had its own challenges. Out of politeness she refused to be offended and wore a mask of being a coping strong girl. She made up her mind that she would not accept his invitation in future. For the first time she felt like a sex-pest's target,

'We are getting money tomorrow. Most of the cast member are going to get R1 000. You as a leading member will get R1 500 but I'll add R300.'

'Thank you, but why are you increasing with R300?'

'Because you're a hard worker and you're more responsible.'

'Thank you bra Goosh.'

'That's not the end of the story. I've got something very juicy for you. I can increase your salary to R3 000.'

She did not respond and he capitalised on that; he felt that gave him an opportunity to be persuasive. 'You can get that if you're a clever girl who knows how to play your cards very well. Reebs, you are an adult, you should understald what I'm suggesting... read between the lines...Look, the car is waiting outside, with a full tank. I can take you somewhere where the two of us can have a good time, and no-one will know. When I eat I'm neat, I don't show off. I wipe my mouth. Get what I mean?

'I don't get what you mean.'

'You're not a small girl, Reebs. Just play your cards well!'

'What do you mean by playing my cards well?'

He suddenly rose from his chair. 'This is what I mean.'

He walked and stood behind her. 'If you look through the window, you will see...'

In an eye's wink he bent down to her, grabbed and pressed her breasts as he kissed her nape. This had happened so fast that she had for a few seconds froze. She grabbed his

hands, removed them from her breasts, jerked upwards, and stepped backwards to an extent that the chair tumbled down.

Quivering with anger, she pointed her index finger towards Gooshkah.

'Don't touch me Gooshkah! You've no right to touch my body. What are you trying to do?'

'You know what I want to do. Don't behave like a small girl!'

She walked out of his office. 'I'm not interested!'

Gooshkah followed her. When she was in the waiting room she stopped, turned towards him and heaved a sigh. 'So you've the nerve to behave like Junior. You said he slept with girls because he said he has a little thing.'

He guffawed. He gestured with his hand. 'I have a big delicious thing,' he licked his lips lewdly, 'that will make you groan with ecstasy you've never experienced in your life!' He smiled, protruded his tongue and licked it.

She scowled at him. 'It's disgusting!'

Her cell-phone rang; she cut off the call, paced towards the door of the waiting room, opened it, banged it behind her and strutted towards the gate, still fuming. He opened the door and stood at the doorway. 'Ag, you can go!' he hollered, waving with the back of his hand. 'You think you're a smart arse? I know of better chicks...'

'Listen here Gooshkah!' she turned towards him when she had reached the gate. 'Save that,' she pointed at his genitals, 'ugly thing between your legs, for cheap girls who are easily impressed with lousy guys like yourself!'

She spat in his direction, her neck catapulting her face.

20 Rabeka's adrenaline had not been expended completely when she was facing Gooshkah. The most convenient way of utilising it would be by a brisk walk; she immediately thought of walking to a park where she hoped to find a moment to speak to herself.

The nearest park was at the Church Square at the centre of the city; but after taking a few steps in that direction, she changed her mind: park was crowded and would be noisy. She decided to try the Sunnyside park which lay over a kilometre away towards the east of the city. She had twelve sets of robots to cross. When she hurried towards the third, her cell-phone rang.

'Bra T,' she answered the cell-phone, 'I'm not in a good mood to speak to you now, I'm sorry!'

'Why? what's the problem?' asked concerned TM.

'Please call me thirty minutes later. Besides, there's too much noise in the street here. Sorry bra T!'

When she arrived at the Sunnyside park, she was not disappointed as the park was sparsely populated; she saw odd couples here and there, some people lying on the lawn, and two black domestic workers in their overalls sitting on a park bench, child-minding their 'madam's' children playing in front of them; she also heard a bell of an ice-cream vendor approaching. She chose a spot farthest from other people, where she spread a newspaper she had bought from a cafe across the park.

Her cell-phone rang; she expected that the person calling could be TM. To her chagrin, it was Gooshkah. *What does the b...*, she could not complete the word 'bastard' in her thought, *want from me?* She cut him off. She sat down on the newspaper, leaning against her right arm, and crossing her legs. She surveyed the place; she was glad she had made the right decision to choose the park. She began to replay what had happened during the last 40 minutes; starting with how the day had started off promisingly when she was invited for a bite in Gooshkah's office, and how it had ended disastrously when she was hurling ugly words at Gooshkah.

She now understood why aunt Mpule said she had no peace when she told her that she was going to work with Gooshkah. Despite a regretful thought she was delighted she had survived the ploy by lecherous Gooshkah. The victorious thought that she had defeated another giant on her path towards the Promised Land, was tempered with a thought of self-blame: *There were several warning signs but I've foolishly ignored them. I should have left the moment he brushed my shoulders at the filing cabinets.* She was angry with herself.

The bell of an ice-cream vendor interrupted her train of thoughts. The man on the tri-cycle smiled at her, a prospective customer. She felt as if the man and other people passing by could read her troubled thoughts; she lay on her back covering her face with another piece of a newspaper. Suddenly she thought: *what has happened to people who promised to pray for me? Haven't the pastor and aunt Mpule said prayer is like a safety belt? Why can't I pray for myself; I'm the one feeling the pain right now!*

She opened her mouth, but she felt her heart was too rocky to produce anything worthwhile for her 'Father who art in heaven.' She felt her heart was too stressed to churn out a real prayer that could twist the hand of the Almighty to cause a change for better. She was disappointed with her fruitless effort.

'The Lord's Prayer' came to mind and she began to pray. Mumbling along it felt artificial and insincere; when she came to the part: 'And forgive us our trespasses, as we also forgive...' she stopped praying. *No God, I'm not yet ready to... I can't forgive Gooshkah!* She tried again to say a different prayer, but nothing came out of her mouth. Something came out of her eyes: tears. She did not bother to wipe them; she had come to realise that the more she wiped the more they poured out.

She lay there until sun-set. As she plodded along out of the park, she was discouraged about her future as an artist. She felt she could as well check the jobs in the classified section of the newspaper. She was also being overtaken by fear that there were more powerful giants lurking in the bush determined to make her a delicious dinner. She had just folded the newspaper, ready to walk to the taxi route when she heard the jazzy ringing-tone of her cell-phone demanding immediate attention.

'Ya!' she answered half-heartedly when she realised it was Gooshkah's call.

'What must I do with your money? When are you fetching...?'

'I don't want it any more! It...'

'You don't want your...'

'Yes! It stinks like you!'

'Don't talk rubbish!'

She cut him off. *Why must I forgive a guy who hasn't said 'sorry' for what he did?* she thought.

Another call came; she smiled when she saw it was from TM.

'Hallo bra T. I feel better now. But I'm still stressed.'

'Why? What's wrong? You told me you were consulting your boss is that...'

'He's no longer my boss?'

'What has gone wrong?'

'He wants to sleep with me. He's no longer my boss. How can I continue working for a guy who wants to take me to bed?'

'I'm sorry to hear about that.'

'He'll keep trying to get me, or he'll fire me. So the best thing is to fire myself.'

Stunned TM was quiet for a moment.

He clearly did not know what to say to reverse the situation.

'Why don't you take him to the Department of Labour or a lawyer?'

'For what? Sexual harassment?'

'Yes! Something like ...'

'I don't think I've the energy to go through that. It's going to be hurtful. It'll be like you've been raped and you have to convince the court that you've been violated. No I don't want to open a wound that is...'

'The wound is going to heal.'

'It's going to take time to heal.'

'You'll be okay within a few days.'

'I don't know!'

When she arrived at Thabang's mother's house, Thabang was busy in the kitchen.

'Why so late?' asked Thabang. 'Haven't you said I would find you at home?'

Rabeka had told them she was going to fetch the money. She had planned to surprise the family with a huge load of groceries that they needed.

'It's a long story. I don't even have the energy to tell it.'

'Make it short. I must know what's bothering you.'

Rabeka folded her arms, looked downward, her eyes beginning to glint with tears.

Thabang walked over to her and began to massage her shoulder before grabbing her by her hand, leading her to the lounge where her mother was watching TV.

Thabang and Rabeka sat on the same couch facing Thabang's mother.

'Ma, can I switch off the TV? RB has a serious problem.'

'What serious problem?' asked Thabang's mother.

'She doesn't want to tell.'

Rabeka related all what had happened to her in Gooshkah's office.

Rabeka began to wipe a tear meandering down her cheek. 'I'm very disappointed with that guy. He told me that Junior was sexually abusing the girls in his drama group. Now today the same man who criticised Junior wants to seduce me. I trusted him so much that had he invited me to his house I would have slept without locking the bedroom.'

Thabang's mother sat quietly.

Again Thabang massaged Rabeka's shoulder.

'You must sue, that evil man!' said Thabang's mother at last.

'No ma, here we don't speak about suing. It's sexual harassment. RB can take the bastard to court, and he'll pay until...'

'No I don't want to go to any court. I just want to go on with my life.'

Thabang and her mother were quiet for a moment, reflecting on what they had been told.

'Has he given you the money you've worked for?' asked Thabang.

'He wanted to give me more money but I don't...'

'You said 'No' to his money?'

'I would only get the money, only if I... ach don't you understand?'

Thabang's mother raised her left index-finger. 'It's a sleep-with-me-first money!'

'He called and I told him I don't want his money any more! I told him it stinks like him!'

Thabang's mother smiled at Rabeka. 'You need to cheer up. Anger kills'

21 That Friday, Rabeka, recieved a phone call from her mother who told her she heard'd the bad news from aunt Mpule.

'I cannot believe that the man you've spoken so well about can do such a thing to you.'

'Well, it has happened.'

'When did it happen?'

'On Wednesday.'

'How do you feel now, girl?'

'I feel better *mma*. Aunt Mpule called me yesterday, and she read some verses from the bible, and she promised to pray for me!'

'I think you must not do this acting thing again.'

Rabeka kept quiet.

'Are you listening?' asked her mother.

'Yes!'

'I know you don't agree with me.'

Rabeka chuckled.

'Maybe I'll get a better company next time.'

'They are the same. The crooks of Gauteng you'll never finish them.'

'I'm positive that the experiences I've received from acting will help me to get a better job.'

'If you get a government job that gives you a house, you'll have done something great, you whose totem is a buffalo!'

Rabeka smiled and nodded as if her mother could see her.

'How's papa?' inquired Rabeka.

'He hasn't been very well. He lost weight.'

'What's the problem?'

'When we took him to the hospital two weeks ago they took his cough and his blood; they said they'll test them and tell us what the problem is.'

'I hope it's nothing very bad.'

'Let's hope so.'

* * *

Just after speaking to her mother her cell-phone rang, and realising that it was Gooshkah, she decided it would be an opportunity to vent her feelings of hurt.

'Yah! What do you want?' yelled Rabeka.

'Are you still angry?'

'What do you expect?'

'After three days the boiling pot must cool down! Please give me a moment to...'

'Yes, speak!'

'I've just received a call from the office of the Mayoress requesting us...'

'So what has that got to do with me?'

'Com'm cool it Reebbs! Let me be frank with you. You'll be stupid if you want to leave my company when so much good is about to happen. The Mayoress is requesting us to perform for the European Union Health Secretariat, the Derdepoort High school are still waiting for a performance date from us, and plans about the Shosholoza drama competition are...'

'I don't care, Gooshkhah!'

'By the way,' he chuckled, ready to unleash what Rabeka never expected, 'how's that beautiful thing between your legs?'
She cut him off.

At Sekiele's house, he had just parked his kombi in front of the garage when his elder sister walked over to him.

'Guess what? Rabbeh has lost her job as an actress!' said Mathilda

'Is that so?'

'Yes! Her mother told me an hour ago. Her mother says she told her that she quit the job because her boss wants to sleep with her. God is punishing her and I hope she'll be humble enough to do what's right: to agree to be your wife. She must blame herself! She could be expecting your first child as your wife now.'

'Sesi Mathilda, don't you think I'm wasting my time over Rabbeh?'

'No. you aren't wasting your time. She'll one day wake up and realise that there's a good honest man who can give her a better life than those wolves of Gauteng! She'll remember you when she's been beaten up by the world.'

Sekiele mulled over his elder sister's words for a moment.

'I have been thinking of something as I walked over here,' said Mathilda, 'Why don't you visit the girl?'

'Visit the girl?' his tone suggested he had never given the matter a thought.

'Yes! You can also give her R500 and tell her God told you to be kind to her. Her heart might still be as hard as a stone but your kind action might make it to be soft like wool.'

On Saturday afternoon aunt Kedibone, Rabeka's youngest aunt, on her way from her place of work, passed at Thabang's mother's place. The last time she had been there was when she had gone to compliment Rabeka for making her clan famous by appearing in City Press and a local newspaper as a prize-winning actress. She found Thabang's mother and Thabang watching TV. When she inquired about Rabeka they told her that she was lying on her bed.

'What's happening? Is she sick or what?' asked concerned aunt Kedibone.

They told her and she was shocked and very sympathetic. She insisted that they wake her up. Rabeka shuffled into the lounge, wearing a morning gown, and her favourite old slippers, yawning.

'*Hee wena* Reebbs!' hollered aunt Kedibone. 'Why are you walking like a chicken drenched by rain?'

Aunt Kedibone stood and walked to Rabeka. 'Com'on, *chesta* like a film star!'

Aunt Kedibone walked in the *chesta* township style in front of Rabeka and they all laughed.

'You get along very well with Reebbs, Kedibone' said Thabang's mother. 'It's the first time in three days that I can see her smile, and hear her laughter.'

'Come and sit next to me *mah* baby,' said aunt Kedibone.

Rabeka leaned on aunt Kedibone's shoulder; her aunt patted her gently. 'They told me about that guy whose name is as ugly as his actions.'

Rabeka's eye glinting with tears, became productive; aunt Kedibone rocked her shoulder as if she were a baby.

'Things will come right, child of my sister. God sees your tears,' comforted aunt Kedibone.

It had become a family tradition that each time aunt Kedibone came past, tea must be made and shared. That day they had tea with muffins brought by aunt Kedibone.

The latest copy of Job Mail Weekly lay in front of Rabeka. Thabang glanced at the paper, focussing where Rabeka had circled in a red pen an au pair job in Germany.

'RB, do you want to work in Germany?'

'It would be nice to go abroad and meet people of different cultures, but it's expensive to go there. One must have money for a return flight ticket, and a drivers' licence.'

'Maybe if you could go to Germany you could meet a nice German guy over there,' Thabang winked at aunt Kedibone.

Aunt Kedibone winked back. 'Plus, German men like African women.'

They all laughed.

After aunt Kedibone had left, Rabeka received a call from Patience. 'Hi Reebbs, what's happening between you and bra Gooshkah?'

'Why?'

'Bra Gooshkah said I should ask, when are you coming to collect your money?' I found it strange that he should ask me. What's the whole story?'

'If you want to hear the whole story, catch a taxi and come to my place now!'

Thirty minutes later, Patience arrived; Rabeka told her what had happened and Patience was shocked.

'Why can't we meet tomorrow at the church attended by my aunt? At the House of Glory?' said Patience as Rabeka walked her to the taxi route.

'No I'm okay at the humble Evangelical church. House of Glory is for the stars; I'm no longer an artist.'

'You'll always be an artist, my friend! You're going to get a break soon. Just be patient and strong.'

Rabeka hugged and kissed Patience. 'Thank you my friend, those are the words that I need the most at this time in my life.'

On Sunday, Rabeka once again missed the church service because she had over-slept; she was angry with herself for missing an opportunity to recharge her batteries, as aunt Mpule had advised.

That Monday evening after supper Thabang chatted to Rabeka as they washed the crockery.

'RB, I can see that life is getting better, but I am worried about you. It's a week that you've been keeping to yourself, not even going out of the gate. I'm inviting you to a drama show at the State Theatre.'

'Thank you for being nice to me, Thabs.'

'You'll use my boyfriend's ticket; someone gave him the tickets but he won't be able to attend; he'll drop us there and fetch us after the show.'

'When is the show?'

'This Friday.'

'Thanks once more; what's the name of the show?'

'Snow-white and the seven dwarfs. Those who saw it say it's nice show, it's full of fun and laughter. It's a children's show; parents are viewing it with their kids. Perhaps you'll meet a gorgeous guy there.'

Rabeka guffawed.

'I'm serious, RB. This life of living like a nun when you're so young, I don't understand it. Even nuns are naughty sometimes.'

Rabeka laughed.

'When are you going to have a boyfriend?' Thabang went on.

Rabeka shrugged. 'I don't know. I'm not thinking of that.'

'If you had a boyfriend Gooshkah wouldn't have had an idea to sleep with you.'

'I don't like the idea of using an unsuitable guy as a body guard, and a shield. No. I'm not thinking of a guy. All I'm thinking about is a great career. Not any creature wearing a pair of trousers, saying "I love you, I love you" will do for me.'

Thabang laughed raucously and slapped Rabeka on her shoulder.

'At the moment,' continued Rabeka, 'I don't want to complicate my life with extra baggage. I'm sure the time will come.'

22 For four days the only thing that kept Rabeka busy was looking for jobs in newspapers. She had not found anything that suited her or which she felt she was best qualified for, but she was hopeful.

Come Friday she strolled to the shopping centre to plait her hair with some brown extensions. After checking in the mirror she was confident that she looked stunning. When Thabang came back from work she complemented Rabeka for her hair, which was the same hair-style with which she went to Windybrow Arts Festival's prize giving night.

At 18h45 that Friday evening Rabeka and Thabang were lazing around the foyer of the State Theatre, basking in the glamour of the place; they had arrived forty-five minutes early and were the only people there. Five minutes later a young man spotting a pitch-black Mapondo hair-style entered, on his way to the lifts.

When the guy saw Thabang and Rabeka he walked over to them. 'Hi early birds!' They responded. He began to scrutinise Thabang. 'Where have I seen you?' Thabang smiled. 'I also think I've seen you somewhere.' Suddenly she snapped her finger, 'We met at a helicopter wedding! Last year! At Atteridgeville!'

'You are right!' agreed the man.

'Helicopter wedding?' asked Rabeka.

'Yes. You know of the practice where after the bride's and groom's march in the street, they go to the Union buildings or a fancy place for photos.'

Rabeka was still amused. 'The rich guy who married Saki's cousin,' continued Thabang, 'hired a helicopter, and it took them to the botanical gardens near Silverton.'

'By the way,' she proffered her hand. 'I'm Thabang Masemola.'

'Saki Ntlailane.'

Thabang gestured towards Rabeka, 'She's my cousin, Reeb's.'

Rabeka and Saki exchanged hand-shakes.

'I'm in the Marketing Section of the State Theatre,' said Saki.

Rabeka nodded with a smile.

'Reeb's is an actress,' boasted Thabang.

Saki looked at Rabeka with a mixture of awe and curiosity. 'Is that so? Ya I've been wondering where I had seen your face...' He snapped his fingers, 'Yes I got you! You are in Junior's group. Okay? I saw you at the drama festival. Your group won and we lost.'

Rabeka chuckled. 'Oh, were you there?'

'Yes! I had taken my drama group there.'

Thabang did not want to tell the truth that Rabeka was no more in Gooskhah's group. 'She's now with Gooskhah.'

'Was with Gooskhah!!' corrected Rabeka.

'What happened?' asked Saki.

'I've resigned,' said Rabeka. 'You know we actors are always in search of new challenges.'

'You're right.' He smiled at Rabeka. 'So what are your plans?'

'Maybe you guys can give me a job as an administrator, or someone's personal assistant,' Rabeka punctuated with a giggle.

'I don't think we have any job at the moment. But I'll speak to my boss.'

'Who's your boss?'

'He's Mahlomola Mofokeng, the Director for Marketing.'

That Saturday after 11h00, Rabeka returned from the internet cafe where she had gone to get her updated CV word-processed. She found Sekiele's kombi waiting in front of Thabang's home. When she entered the lounge she found him with Thabang; he was finishing drinking tea.

Thabang left the room discretely and joined her mother in the kitchen. Rabeka got a clear impression that he had made an effort to impress her with his attire: he had worn a purple suit with a black shirt with silver buttons, and a brand-new sharp pointed, elongated pair of cream shoes made of alligator hide.

'I'm sorry to take you by surprise, Rabbeh,' said Sekiele. 'I'm just passing by. You know the taxi business can take you anywhere, any time. My taxi licence now includes Pretoria.'

'I see' said Rabeka who had not recovered from the shock of meeting Sekiele. *I hope I'm seeing you for the last time*, she thought.

Sekiele fidgeted with his pocket and took out an envelope. 'Your parents said I should give you this.'

Rabeka received it with doubt. Sekiele did not want to waste a moment.

He stood up. 'I must go. In the taxi business, time wasted doesn't buy a cow.'

When Sekiele had left she opened the envelope; she found some bank notes wrapped in a sheet of paper on which something was written; she read: *That money is not from your parents. We heard of your trouble in the drama business. God said I should give you that R500 - Ezekiel Masubelele.*

Sekiele had been shrewd enough not to tell her straight that the money came from him.

He felt that she would say: *No I don't want anything from you!*

Rabeka was still looking at the envelope as if she expected it to say something to her when Thabang entered with a mugful of tea and began to sip, giving Rabeka a knowing smile. 'Is that the guy who should have married you?'

'Yes!'

'What's his surname?'

'Is that important to know?'

'Yes. For me.'

'Masubelele.'

'So you just refused to be Mrs Masubelele? You said 'no!' to a wedding ring, a car and a house?'

'Yes! Life isn't about only material things?'

'I want to be honest with you, RB. If this had happened to me I wouldn't have said "no!"'

'Even if you knew you had no love for the guy?'

'Yes. I'd hope love would grow later.'

'I can't believe that a city girl like you thinks like my mother?'

'Such half-love marriages are happening in the city.'

'You marry half-love and then look for real love outside marriage, later? I wasn't prepared to do that!'

'Well you're a girl with a strong character.'

They kept quiet for a moment.

'If it were in some cultures your parents wouldn't consult you,' said Thabang.

'They would take the guy's money and tell you later that the guy was your husband.'

'Yes. You remind me of the story of Salamina.'

'What happened to her?' asked Thabang.

'Her mother had married her off to a local supermarket owner she had owed. The businessman had said to Salamina's mother: "Because you owe me R3 000 I shall take your daughter to be my wife. I'll give you another R2 000 to complete lobola." As a result Salamina became the businessman's third and youngest wife.'

'Hau! exclaimed Thabang.

'Yes! She was younger than the children of older wives. A few months later the older wives began to hate her; one of them threatened that she would make Salamina to suffer from mafufunyane type of madness through witchcraft. Salamina took the threat seriously because that had happened at another village.'

'When she told her husband about the threat, he just laughed it off. "Have I ever promised that my older wives would treat you like their queen? If they hate you it means they have a serious competition, and that must make you happy!"

In the third year of the marriage Salamina never had a child, and older women ridiculed her for being a mule that would never give birth. Love for Salamina began to wane when the businessman got interested in another village girl whom he soon impregnated. Salamina poured her heart to her mother: about her unfaithful husband and the older wives whom she had referred to as "two old witches." She also told her mother that it would be better for her to return to her home sane than lose her mind because of witchcraft.'

'Hee, African chemistry!' said Thabang.

'Salamina's mother,' continued Rabeka, 'told her daughter that she was no longer a child and that she like other women must learn to bear the burden. "There's no house that doesn't allow some rain-drops to come in. Most women that people are envying are persevering. So my child, you must not ask for a light load. May God and the gods give you a strong back to carry the burden. And don't ever think of coming back home. How will I repay Sehlwa-moruleng R5 000? Do you want people who used to envy me to jeer at me and you?'

'Ag shem the poor girl was trapped!' Thabang sympathised.

'Yes. Because she was trapped between an unhappy marriage and her mother, Salamina committed suicide.'

'Oh, what a pity!'

Rabeka glanced at the envelope.

Thabang gestured towards the envelope. 'He gave you something?'

'Yes. Money.'

'How much?'

'Five hundred rand. I don't know why he's doing that? I hope my mother hasn't played a role in this. He's got a very cunning sister. I wouldn't be surprised if it's her idea. I'm not going to use the money!'

'Why?'

'Tomorrow I could be told it was a deposit for lobola.'

They had a good laugh.

Thabang took an envelope out of her overall and handed it to Rabeka. 'A girl called Patience brought this envelop.'

She handed it to Rabeka.

Thabang smiled and teasingly protruded her tongue. 'You're a lucky girl. Perhaps the envelope is bringing more money.'

Rabeka tore the envelop open. 'You're right it's money from Gooshkah.'

'That's good!'

Rabeka counted the money. 'He's given me an extra R500. I don't want it! I'll send it back to him!'

'No don't do that. It could be an amount to wipe off your tears.'

'No amount can wipe my tears.'

* * *

On Sunday, Rabeka did not miss church. She was one of the first parishioners there, arriving fifteen minutes before the service started at 10h00. When the congregation prayed 'The Lord's Prayer' Rabeka kept quiet at the part when she had to say: '...as we forgive those who trespass against us...' But when she reached the part 'Give us this day our daily bread,' she was the most enthusiastic, praying with open expectant hands.

The man of God closed his bible, adjusting his spectacles. 'Those having all sorts of problems come forward and share your burden with Jesus. Looking for a husband or a wife? Looking for a job? Didn't our Lord say: 'Come to me all who are heavily burdened, and I'll give you rest?'

People flocked to the front of the church between the first row and the pulpit, and some deacons laid hands on them.

After the prayer the pastor stood and smiled at the people standing in front. 'Just have faith and you'll receive from God. Now as you go to your seats just thank God in advance for answered prayers.'

A woman shuffling in front of Rabeka, shouted stretching her arms upwards. 'Thank you Lord, for a sweet husband!'

'Thank you Lord, for a job in marketing at the State Theatre, Hallelujah!!' said Rabeka.

On Monday morning, Saki called Rabeka. 'I have good news for you, Reeb.' 'Tell me, Saki!'

'I've spoken to my boss and he says we do need an additional person in Marketing. Your background as an actress will be useful.'

Rabeka heaved a sigh of joy. 'Thank you, Saki. Oh, I don't know how to express my joy!'

Saki chuckled.

'What does the job involve?' inquired ecstatic Rabeka.

'The person will help to sell the drama "Maru" to the high schools in the Soshanguve-Garankuwa-Mabopane areas. "Maru" is based on Bessie Head's novel, and is a Grade 12 set-work. We are looking for additional staff because I've been promoted to the position of manager, and my post is as a result vacant. I think you're the right person; your theatre background is an advantage, and you sound enthusiastic.' Rabeka chuckled.

'Mr Mofokeng would like to see you this afternoon at 14h00,' Saki told Rabeka, 'on the eleventh floor office 1105.'

'Thank you Saki! I'll be there.'

23 On Monday afternoon Rabeka was studying a bespectacled, clean-shaven face focused on her completed application forms and a curriculum vitae. Twenty minutes ago Rabeka had entered the office whose door was inscribed in golden cursive: *Mahlomola Mofokeng, Director - Marketing*.

He leaned his face against the hand leaning on the table. 'Tell me briefly about yourself.' Rabeka sketched her life from the time she got involved in drama when she was a Sunday school kid, until she worked with TM. She also mentioned how she joined Junior's and Gooshkah's groups, stating the reasons for leaving as a search for new challenges.

'Please tell me more about the "Realise Your Dream" project,' said Mahlomola,

who had been jotting down something on a clean sheet.

Rabeka presented a detailed explanation to an eager listener.

He wrinkled his forehead. 'Interesting! And tell me why I must give you the job.'

'My contribution to Marketing Division will be as follows: I'm going to fill the biggest theatre with students from high schools in Soshanguve-Mabopane-Garankuwa. Learners studying arts and culture are going to be empowered to pass the subject and those who aren't doing the subject are going to learn life skills.'

He closed a newly opened file containing Rabeka's documents

He brushed his bald head and smiled. 'I have a feeling you're the right person, for the right job, at the right time.'

'Oh thank you very much Mr Mofokeng!' said an elated Rabeka.

'But I'll confirm.'

'When should I expect to hear from you, Mr Mofokeng?'

He smiled. 'Soon. If we'll take you the next interview will be about salary and the starting date.'

'I shall greatly appreciate a positive response, Mr Mofokeng.'

He glanced at his gold wrist-watch and rose from his chair. 'Thank you for attending the interview.'

He ogled her, from her shoulders down to her calves, as her legs carried her towards the door.

'Fresh, nice, delicious thing!' he whispered.

She was about to touch the door-knob when she turned towards him. 'Are you saying something, Mr Mofokeng?'

He chuckled. 'I was repeating that you're the right person for the right job.' He unleashed a radiant smile. 'And please stop *mistering* me.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Please stop calling me Mr, Mr! This is a place for artists. So just call me Hloms!'

She smiled primly. 'Goodbye bra Hloms!'

He winked, smiling. 'Bye Reebbs!'

It was her first day at her new job. Wearing a new dress, new hair-style, new nail-polish, a new pantyhose and new shoes, she stepped had into Mahlomola's office twenty minutes before, oozing nothing but confidence.

As Mahlomola reached for the phone she gave him another analytical glance; the more she met him the more he became business-like. She was meeting him for the third time. Her tongue kept slipping into 'Mr Mofokeng', instead of sticking the preferred 'bra Hloms.' He was patient with her; every time she said 'Mr Mofo...' his smile got out giggles from her mouth. When he looked at her as she laughed he so wished she would be laughing on his shoulder. But at that moment he felt that the serious professional man was stronger than the emotional man.

He smiled. 'Hallo Saks!' She gasped thinking he was saying 'sex.' But that was just how he had addressed Saki. 'You can come now.'

Saki was there in a matter of seconds.

'I'm done with her. You know what to do.'

Saki smiled at Rabeka. 'Come *sesi*!'

Rabeka turned towards Mahlomola. 'Thanks Mr Mof...bra Hloms!'

Loud peals of laughter from the three filled the place.

Saki took Rabeka to his office where he introduced her to the staff in the Marketing Division in the open-plan office. Rabeka shook hands with chubby Dolly, lean-faced Hlamarisa, Rastafarian hair-styled Mike and cap-loving Podile. Saki informed them that for the next one hour and a half he would be busy taking Rabeka around the building, introducing her.

As Rabeka walked away beside Saki, Hlamarisa radiated a smile that matured into a sneer. 'When we were hired we were give plain tea,' said Hlamarisa, 'but others are spoilt with muffins.'

'What are you talking about?' asked Dolly.

'Haven't you seen the tea-woman taking a tray full of muffins to bra Hloms office?'

'No. But bra Hloms is an executive. There are always big-shots visiting him.'

'That big-shot is with Saki,' Hlamarisa chuckled, 'she's being taken around the building.'

Dolly, Mike and Podile ignored Hlamarisa's comment in different ways; the men concentrated on their diaries while Dolly steered a teaspoon in her paper cup steaming with hot chocolate.

When Saki and Rabeka returned it was tea-time. While Rabeka sat at her table, Saki remained standing.

'Guys we are going to have a time-table for training Reebbs,' Saki told his subordinates. 'Dolly as my assistant, will compile it. Secondly this afternoon's briefing meeting about "Maru School's Project" has been moved to the boardroom on the twelfth-floor. See you at 14h00.'

Saki left. Dolly gave Rabeka some reading material and she guided her and answered her questions, for the rest of the day.

At 18h00 a joyful chatter filled the house of Thabang's mother as Rabeka told Thabang's mother, aunt Kedibone and Thabang, over a cup of tea, how she had spent her first day as Trainee Marketing Specialist of the State Theatre.

'It's a nice job; I like it, and the people are nice,' Rabeka told them.

'I told you that God sees your tears,' said aunt Kedibone.

'I felt good when I attended our briefing session. We're going to invite schools to send their students to the State Theatre to attend the stage play called "Maru". The job is exciting. My colleagues are training me this week, and next week I'll be going out with the driver, visiting the high schools in Ga-Rankuwa, Soshanguve and Mabopane.'

'I'm sure you're going to meet interesting people,' said aunt Kedibone.

'Yes, of course!'

Thabang winked at her. 'This time you're going to make a good catch!'

They all roared with laughter.

'And there's an award to be won by the Marketing Specialist who sells the highest number of tickets.'

'When is the opening night?' asked Thabang.

'On Friday 5th August and it will end on September 4. I'll give you tickets for the opening night,' said Rabeka, evoking even brighter smiles from the faces of her people.

24 After dinner Rabeka called aunt Mpule who told her she was delighted that she got a new job. Rabeka asked aunt Mpule to share the good news with her mother, also mentioning that she hoped she would visit home at the end of the month. Rabeka later called TM who was thrilled to receive the good news; typical of him he gave her a piece of advice. 'Always do more than is required of you. If it means spending thirty minutes before and after work then do that. Aim for excellence and not the mediocre 50 percent.'

'Thanks bra T!' responded Rabeka.

'Secondly remember that getting ready is the secret of success.'

On that Friday which completed her first working week she went home with a few posters and hand-bills for the 'Maru School's Project'. She had also requested a copy of the play's script. She had heeded TM's latest advice, and had a plan of how she would sell the play to the schools. After they had washed the dinner dishes she called Thabang. 'I want you to help me rehearse what I'm going to say to the school principals next week.' She looked around the kitchen, with a director's sharp eye. 'Okay you are the school principal'

Thabang guffawed, flattered.

Rabeka pointed. 'You sit over here and you are busy with your work. And I knock at the door.'

'Come!'

'I enter confidently, with a bright smile, and I greet you. "Good morning ma'm!" I stretch my arm, I give you a firm confident hand-shake, and I introduce myself. "I'm Reeb's Maru-a-pula, Marketing Specialist from the State Theatre".

I immediately sell you the product: "I've good news for your Grade 12 students, whose set-work is "Maru" a novel by Bessie Head...the play will stir interest in the students and will help them get high marks..." okay let's start all over again. After I've said "...from the State Theatre", you must say: "Have a seat. How can I help you?" And I must remember to have my posters ready in my hand.'

Thabang stood up. 'RB, you can enter holding your hand-bag and your desk diary with your right hand and the posters and hand-bills with the left hand. How's that?'

'Sounds great! Thanks!'

As they rehearsed for the third and last time, Thabang's mother watched with increasing amusement.

Thabang's mother pointed towards Rabeka. 'And you must put fresh lip-stick, before you enter.'

'Thanks auntie Lobisa,' appreciated Rabeka, 'It's wonderful that I'm getting a support from the family!'

On Saturday and Sunday afternoon Thabang and Rabeka rehearsed the presentation. Thabang had enjoyed performing the principal's role. Rabeka also rehearsed the part she thought was the climax of the play. Come Monday she was ready to hit the road.

* * *

To every school that she intended to visit she asked to speak to the head and or the History Social Science teacher, requesting also to give the students a taste of what was to come, by way of performing an excerpt. She visited 10 high schools a day for four days. For her the most fulfilling part of the presentation, was when she performed the excerpt. She had no doubt that her rehearsal of the 'sales-talk' with Thabang would bear fruit.

On Friday the media had been invited to cover the progress report of the project. About 100 students from the city-centre high schools, had been randomly invited to be an audience.

Fifty teachers representing their schools also attended. A few minutes before the gong struck, two arts journalists from local newspapers chatted in the foyer of the main theatre, socialising with their colleagues. The cast rendered a 30-minutes performance which was enthusiastically received by the audience.

As the cast performed Rabeka's heart told her it was more fulfilling to be on the stage than be part of the audience; but she also felt it was refreshing to be a viewer and a sort of a critic. She kept asking herself how the scenes might have been improved.

After the performance all were treated to finger lunch. It was an opportunity for the audience to meet the cast, and for the journalists to interview some performers and for the photographers to take some close-ups. The State Theatre's photojournalist, Erika, amicable, middle aged woman who spoke English with an unmistakable German accent, also took pictures for the house journal.

Rabeka did not hesitate to look for one of the actresses, a buxom coffee-coloured woman who had impressed her with her stage presence. As the actress was still being mobbed by students she shook hands with other performers, congratulating them. Rabeka at last met the actress wearing a sky-blue kaftan, and brown hair extensions. She introduced herself as Busi Masombuka. Rabeka told her that she was a newly recruited Marketing Specialist.

Rabeka felt a hand tapping her shoulder. It was Mahlomola's hand. 'Reebs, come let's pose for a picture.'

Erika was adjusting the lenses of her camera. Mahlomola's right hand lightly embraced Rabeka's shoulder, smiling with her, as the flashlight whirled.

Moments later as Rabeka enjoyed her finger-lunch standing beside Mahlomola, Busi walked over to them. She grabbed Mahlomola by his hand and led him to another part of the place where she chatted to him. Rabeka saw Busi repeatedly gesturing towards her.

When Rabeka came back from the media launch, a woman working at the booking office called her; she asked her to come with other Marketing Specialists. They found the woman with Mahlomola.

'Reebs,' said the booking officer, 'I'm delighted to inform you that more than 35 of the 40 high schools which you've contacted have confirmed that they're sending their students to the show. Congratulations!'

Ecstatic, Reebs leapt upwards and clapped her hands. Mahlomola hugged Reebs and kissed her on her cheeks. He kissed close to the corner of her mouth, as she turned her cheek, to avoid what could have been a lip-to-lip kiss. Reebs' colleagues congratulated her.

The other four Marketing Specialists had in total received confirmation from 40 schools, which meant that each managed to recruit only ten. At the end of the short meeting Reeb remained with Mahlomola and the booking officer, while the other Marketing Specialists went to their office.

Hlamarisa stood next to her desk, her hands on her waist. 'How can Reeb being a new-comer get so many schools within four days?' she queried, 'Bra Hloms must have played a role in this!'

For moment Dolly, Mike and Podile quietly exchanged glances.

'And when we do something good,' continued Hlamarisa, 'We only get hand-shakes but other people get kisses.'

'No, Hlams,' said Podile, referring to Hlamarisa. 'Let's be positive! If Reeb is a new-comer and she beats us, we must be humble enough to approach her and say: "sistah, how did you get it right?"'

'I agree with Pod,' said Mike. 'As for the kisses, let's be adults guys. Let's not talk petty politics!'

'You say I'm speaking petty politics?' Hlamarisa did not like to be put down.

'Okay guys,' Dolly intervened. 'Let's direct our energies to what needs to be done: We have a show to sell and let's do just that. Let's view Rabeka's success as a challenge and not competition.'

That Friday evening Rabeka told Thabang and aunt Lobisa how the rehearsal of her presentation had yielded huge dividends in the form of earning recognition from the booking office. Thabang and her mother felt very good that their contribution was worthwhile.

'I was successful because I had prepared for the assignment,' Rabeka told Thabang just before they went to bed, 'And what also worked in my favour was my youth and enthusiasm!'

'And your beauty too, RB!'

Rabeka chuckled with content.

On Monday morning she told Saki that she intended to visit her parents on Friday. 'Can I work overtime this week to compensate for Friday?' she negotiated.

'I think that is perfectly in order. I'll speak to bra Hloms. I don't think he'll have any qualms. Especially when we consider that you've done very well in getting confirmations from the schools, thus far.'

For the next three days Reeb visited more schools, and followed up with telephone and cell-phone calls. That Wednesday as she was doing the last tele-sale Saki entered her office and waited until she had finished. He was accompanied by the corporate photojournalist, Erika.

Saki smiled. 'You're a work-horse, *neh*, Reeb?'

Rabeka chuckled.

'The Communications sub-section of marketing would like to write a profile on you, for our house journal,' said Saki.

Erika shot several photos from various angles and left. By 12h00 on Thursday she had received confirmations from 25 high schools, making her total 60.

During lunch she was on her way to the lifts when Rabeka had a brain wave to go to Mahlomola's office; she wanted to thank him for agreeing that she could take off on Friday.

When she was a door away from his office she decided to get in through the office nearest to her, a vacant office that was used by Mahlomola's PA/Secretary; the office served as a waiting room for Mahlomola's guests. After she walked in she found the door leading to Mahlomola's office left ajar. She decided not to knock but to push the door gently; she thought perhaps he could be taking a cat-nap as it was known to be his habit.

When she entered the office with bated breath, her eyes were attracted by movement on the black leather couch beside Mahlomola's table. She saw Mahlomola on top of a well-fleshed woman, making love; breathing heavily. Rabeka thought she had seen the woman's face somewhere. He had removed his pair of trousers, and she saw his buttocks. As Rabeka paced backwards, the woman saw her, and Rabeka recognised her as Busi.

She walked to the lifts blaming herself for entering her boss's office, and seeing what she was not supposed to see. She was prepared to apologise to Mahlomola, if he could confront her. He never came to her office until knock-off time.

25 Rabeka's mother sat on a sisal-mat and applauded twice to Rabeka as if she were an elder person. 'Welcome home, girl of the clan whose totem is the buffalo.' Rabeka also applauded twice.

Her father walked in; Rabeka also applauded twice, and her father kissed the tips of the clasped middle fingers as the tribes-people often did to children up to the age of ten to twelve years.

Rabeka enjoyed being a child; she had come home to 'suck from her mother' as some villagers would put it. She had arrived late in the afternoon; she had delayed because she had to go to the city to buy some presents for her parents and her two siblings. She told them about how she was enjoying the job as a Marketing Specialist; her parents listened eagerly and were filled with pride.

'This is the kind of a job that I always wanted you to do,' said her mother. 'Are they going to give you a house?'

'I'm still on probation now, which means I'm still being tested,' said Rabeka. 'I'll check with the personnel office about housing allowance after six months.'

'Your father wanted you to get him a job as a driver or as security,' her mother told her, 'but he won't be able to do that anymore.'

'Why *mma*?'

'He's suffering from cancer.'

'Oh, I'm sorry to hear about this disease,' Rabeka stood and walked to her father and gave him a bear-hug. 'I never thought this kind of a disease could attack my parent, I'm sorry papa. I hope you'll heal papa!'

Rabeka's siblings had gone to spend a weekend at her elder sister's house. After supper Rabeka sat with her parents in the lounge, chatting hours away.

Rabeka told them that her background as an actress made it easier for her to get the job as a marketing officer. Her mother who did not want to get into any argument about how acting was not a reliable profession said she hoped Rabeka would work for

years at the State Theatre. Rabeka took a cell-phone from her shopping plastic bag and handed it to her mother. 'Here is a means of communication, *mma*.'

'Thank you, whose totem is the buffalo,' appreciated her mother. 'Isn't it difficult?' asked her mother whose eyes told a tale of wonder.

'No, it's easy to learn. I'll show you tomorrow.'

Rabeka further handed her mother a jersey, and her father a jacket and a hat. Her father was very grateful.

Rabeka also gave her mother another shopping plastic bag containing some clothes and shoes for her brother and sister. The last gift that she put into her mother's hands was an amount of R2 000. Both father and mother greatly appreciated Rabeka's gesture.

On Saturday afternoon TM and aunt Mpule were Rabeka's guests. Her parents had gone see other relatives, probably to boast about what their daughter was doing and had done for them.

'It's good to see you personally Rabbeh,' said aunt Mpule. 'You seem to have grown a little...what do you think Teacher Matlamela?'

They roared with laughter.

'I'm delighted to see you eye-to-eye, too!' said Rabeka, 'I appreciate how you've been a source of support when I was going through a difficult period in my life.'

'You're the pride of the village Rebecca,' said TM. 'You deserve our support to the hilt.'

'How's the project, Bra T?' asked Rabeka

'It's going on very well. We had some hiccups with the drama because of some absenteeism among the performers, but we're forging ahead. We're still waiting to hear from the Department about a possible sponsorship.'

Rabeka nodded and smiled at TM. 'Thank you bra T for the advice that I should do more than what I'm required to do, and the need to prepare. Because of those words of wisdom, I've performed very well in my marketing assignment.'

'I'm delighted that my suggestion has been helpful.'

'Are you happy with your new job,' inquired aunt Mpule smiling ear-to-ear.

'Yes. And I'm glad that my parents are happy that I'm doing this secure job that guarantees a salary at the end of each month.'

'God is good,' said aunt Mpule.

'Yes, security is good,' agreed TM.

Following a pause a smile crossed his face; Rabeka knew there was something brewing deep in his head. She was right.

'You know a certain wise guy said ships are safe in the harbour but they aren't made for that.'

'You're right Teacher Matlamela,' responded aunt Mpule.

'To be honest I love the job,' said Rabeka, 'It's challenging and interesting. But I still think I can do something that satisfies me more than just earning a fixed salary.'

'What do you want to do?'

'I want achieve great things in the performing arts. I feel I haven't yet scratched the surface.'

'I know I don't want to do this job for more than a year or even six months. But I have to do it just to please my parents.'

Aunt Mpule shook her head. 'That's not right Rabbeh! Do what you want to do most. And believe in yourself! My girl, refuse to settle for a "C" when God has promised and called you to an "A".'

Rabeka applauded. 'Amen auntie!'

On Sunday in the afternoon Rabeka arrived in Pretoria. She found Thabang washing the crockery. Rabeka had lunch, in between spoonfuls, updating Thabang, who enjoyed every morsel of the news.

'Did you meet that guy who had visited you?' asked curious Thabang, referring to Sekiele.

'No!'

'Did you return the R500 he had given you?'

'I left the money in an envelope addressed to him.'

'Have you asked your mother to take the money back?'

Rabeka crushed a piece of a banana bread and custard between her palate and her tongue. 'No. I left the envelope on my bed. I hope my mother will find it one day and return it to the guy.'

Thabang smiled at Rabeka. 'So you're serious you don't want marriage running into your arms?'

'No, match-maker!'

Thabang snapped her fingers. 'I nearly forget! A guy called Sbu was looking for you on Saturday.'

'What did he say?'

'He just said he wanted to see you.'

Rabeka took out her cell-phone and made a call. 'I must phone Sbu and tell him to come and collect the tickets for the previews!'

Rabeka spoke to Sbu's voice-mail.

A twinkle in her eye, Thabang smiled at Rabeka. 'Is the guy your...?' She pulled her chin with her index finger and thumb gently, suggesting a male's beard.

Rabeka guffawed.

'No! I told you I'm not in hurry for a B-friend. Sbu's just a friend. I met him in Gooshkah's group.'

'I thought my gospel about having a man in your life has been noted.'

'It has been noted. But I've a feeling that for some time I'm going to have male friends. When you've a male friend you relax in the relationship and you learn to understand guys. For me that's a good preparation for a relationship with a guy you want to be emotionally involved with.'

'Maybe you're right. But what if the guy you want to treat just as a friend wants you to be his girl-friend? I mean the real girl-friend...'

'That can be a challenge. But I think there are ways of indicating early in the relationship the direction which it must take in future. Perhaps one clever way is to say: "Please share this information with your girl-friend," or "This can be a nice present for your girl-friend."'

Thabang flashed a smile, and suddenly smacked Rabeka's arm. '*Hai sukha wena!* You're just afraid of boys!'

The laughed.

26 Time never crawled but flew and it was 11th August: it was exactly four weeks since Rabeka had started working at the State Theatre. In the morning Mahlomola checked his diary, sipping coffee. He realised that he had scribbled: *To evaluate Reeb's progress*. After the evaluation Rabeka would no longer be a 'trainee' but a full Marketing Specialist.

Mahlomola called Saki. 'Hi Saks, will you please send Reeb's to my office this afternoon at 14h00? I just want to see for myself how she's grasping the job. If there's any problem area I'll tell you, and you can see how to address it. I'm not trying to police you Saki. It's a way of ensuring that your training is sharp-shoot.'

'Okay bra Hloms!' said Saki who had no objection as Mahlomola often did this with new employees.

A minute before 14h00 conscientious Rabeka knocked at the door just above the name board.

Oh just look how fresh, nice and delicious is the chick, thought Mahlomola, as Rabeka entered his office, wearing a purple dress whose hem was a few centimetres above her knees. The neckline made it possible for Mahlomola's pair of predatory eyes to see the groove where her twin breasts met. Red-hot desire caused him to salivate as if he was looking at a roasted, nice-smelling fat-dripping steak into which he was about to plunge his teeth.

After she had taken a seat he told her about the purpose of the meeting. He smiled and moistened his lower lip. 'How do you find the job? Do you really want to do it?' he asked, his eyes flitting between her eyes and her breasts.

He also noted her smooth arms filled with bangles and well-manicured nails.

'I find the job very challenging and stimulating, bra Hloms. And I really want to do it because I'll feel fulfilled. I say fulfilled because it's in an environment of the performing arts - my passion.'

'I like your enthusiasm!'

'Thanks bra Hloms!'

His eyes focussed on her lips. *Oh, how succulent! Yum!*

'But listen Reeb's,' he continued, 'I'll need quality time with you, to get down to the nitty-gritties. There many distractions at the office, especially because the position of my PA has been frozen; phone calls, unscheduled meetings, and people dropping in, can all be nuisance. So I decided that I should take you out for lunch at a restaurant on Saturday at 13h00. I shall confirm the venue tomorrow.'

He paused to read her face. 'Is that okay with you?'

'Yes, bra Hloms.'

When Rabeka entered the marketing office and walked to her table, Hlama glanced at her wrist watch. 'Why are you back so soon? It's less than fifteen minutes.'

'Bra Hloms says he wants to have quality time with me at a restaurant, on Saturday.'

Hlama gave Dolly a question-mark glance. 'Which restaurant?' asked Hlama.

'I don't know. He says he'll confirm tomorrow on Friday.'

Rabeka's cell rang and she rushed out of the office to answer it and to speak in the corridor.

Hlama churned a knowing smile to Dolly. 'We were evaluated in his office; but others are taken to restaurants. *Mh!* other women's children are living in paradise!'

'Why should things be done the same way every year?' Dolly came to Mahlomola's defence, 'If he thinks taking out a subordinate for lunch will add value to his plan, he must use his discretion.'

'No Dolly, don't be bra Hloms' advocate! Face facts! And what's so special about Reeb's?'

Reeb's coughed before re-entering the office. Hlamarisa got engrossed on her desk, without raising her head.

That Saturday afternoon Mahlomola entered the out-of-city thatch-roofed restaurant, Skhethu, holding Rabeka by her nail-polished left hand; her arm was arrayed with copper and wooden bangles. He sniffed at her scent, and felt it roused the boy in him. Scanning the people and tables in front of them, and walking as if his heels were fitted with springs, he felt scores of eyes, he was certain, filled with nothing but envy. He had quickly assessed the couples and he prided himself on being the only one escorting a '16-V' model.

She had planned to appear semi-formally in terms of dress and hair-style, but Thabang had other plans. She insisted that Rabeka should look really stunning with a braided hair-style, that made her as if she was born with an egg-shaped head. Thabang also lent Rabeka her isiSwati print that showed the straps of her black bra on bare shoulders. Two red prints with black geometrical patterns were knotted across her shoulders, and under her arms. A string of beads hung on her neck and another one on her forehead.

Thabang had to persuade Rabeka to agree to go out looking so chic. 'There's nothing wrong in looking a little sexually titillating to your boss,' Thabang had lectured her, 'He'll feel important and be proud of you! And you must enjoy the benefit of your youth; exploit it to your advantage!'

The first few minutes after she had fastened her seat and the automatic BMW 'ate the kilometres' Rabeka felt tense, wondering if she had taken the right decision by going out with Mahlomola. But she agreed with Dolly that work-related outings were quite in order. She trusted Dolly. Mahlomola was patient with bashful Rabeka. He knew he would soon 'open' her. As a more socially experienced man, he knew that the easiest way of ridding her of her self-consciousness was to let her speak about herself.

He first complimented her over her dress, and asked where she had got it. She would not tell that it was a borrowed dress. All she said was she had a Swazi relative who brought it for her. She was convinced it was a good idea that she should look attractive to Mahlomola. She felt confident and confidence led to relaxation; that pleased her boss.

Mahlomola was seeing another part of Rabeka's personality that he found very intriguing. It was the first time that he heard her laughing with an open mouth, unbridled, with sparks in her eyes. He was impressed with the strides she had taken – a girl from a humble village, who was now a marketing specialist at the State Theatre.

When she mentioned the name of her village as 'Nobody,' he was amazed. 'You're joking!

Is it a real name?'

'Yes! You can ask anyone who lives in the east of Polokwane and they'll confirm what I'm saying. It's on the way towards the University of Limpopo.'

'I shouldn't be amazed by such a name. If you travel all over the country you'll come across many funny names. For example here in Pretoria, at Atteridgeville there's a suburb called *Hlala mpya* - Divorce the dog.'

'*Hlala mpya* ?'

'I'm telling you! When most professional women, especially nurses, were caught up in unhappy marriages, their friends and colleagues would be quick to say: "Divorce the damn dog," and go and stay at a better suburb.'

This relaxed and merry conversation provided a solid foundation for the rest of their outing.

At the restaurant, during the meal, Rabeka was impressed with how Mahlomola conducted himself professionally. He first asked questions, and made notes as she spoke. He then challenged her to come with answers, avoiding spoon-feeding her. That boosted her confidence.

He finally gave some miscellaneous marketing tips. He reminded her of TM. The business part came to an end as they had dessert. He had gradually steered the discussion in the social direction.

As his eyes gloated on her smooth hand, and her arms loaded with bangles, he suddenly grabbed her hand, smoothing his palm over her arm, towards her elbow. Rabeka extricated her arm.

He pinched her arm. 'Just relax Reeb. Playing while working is highly encouraged by industrial psychologists.'

He gave her a hot smile. 'I hope you can now appreciate how an outing contributes to your work.'

Rabeka smiled, nodding.

'A social event like this one is part of your work; it's good that I should get to know you better as part of my staff. This will make you more productive. Are you with me?'

'Yes, bra Hloms!'

He brushed her arms and she did not get tensed up. He got a positive feed-back. 'Have you a boyfriend?'

She giggled, gazing into his eyes.

He moistened his upper lip, looking into her eyes. 'No I'm not trying to pry into your personal life. I must know, in case there could be a problem in future. For example you could be having a jealous boyfriend who could come here and make a scene, threatening to harm or even kill you... this has happened in many organisations...'

'Yes, bra Hloms, I have a boyfriend,' she lied with a blush.

'Really?'

'Yes!'

'That's interesting. I'd be surprised that a young beautiful thing like you is without a guy. Where does he live? What's his occupation? Is he that guy who was with you during the opening night?'

'No that one is just a friend. My boyfriend is a teacher at the village of Nobody. He's the one who started the project of "Realise Your dream."'

'Good!' his tone was tinged with disappointment.
Rabeka was not pleased that she had used TM as her shield.

As he drove back to Pretoria, he resisted the desire to take her to his flat. He felt it was too early. He was convinced he had sowed seeds that would grow, flower and bear fruit; it was just a matter of time. He was certain that with his hand which he felt had seen many suns and moons, and tasted umpteen summers and winters, he could mould her into something that could make him a source of envy. He knew of other CEO's who flaunted Young Beautiful Things as their trophies.

On Monday when Dolly asked Rabeka how the outing was, she became vague, avoiding getting into any details, with all the guys listening.

During lunch when Dolly saw Mike walking towards Rabeka's table she stood up and gestured towards him. 'Wait, Mike. Today I must go out with Rabeka. It's girls-only talk okay?'

Mike playfully scowled at Dolly. Rabeka chuckled.

Dolly smiled at Mike. 'I'm sorry Mike. You'll have her tomorrow.'

27 Dolly led Rabeka towards a table at the corner of the cafeteria, where they had lunch of rice, chicken and mixed vegetables. 'How was the outing with the boss?' asked Dolly again.

'It was great!'

'Where did you go?'

'Skethu, on Moloto road towards Mpumalanga.'

'I know the place. It's nice.'

'Yes. What language is Skethu?'

'It's isiNdebele. It means our culture - they way we do things in our culture.'

'Okay.'

Dolly smiled generously. 'And how was the food?'

'Delicious! We had roasted guinea fowl with wild spinach, and dumpling mixed with marula-fruit nuts. For dessert we had banana boats.'

Dolly slurped. 'Oh don't make me wish I had tasted that!'

They laughed.

'Ya, we got to know each other,' Rabeka told an avid listener, who smiled.

'Tell me Dolly: What kind of a man is bra Hloms?' asked Rabeka, after she had sipped her mango juice.

She avoided the straightforward question: *Does he like women?*

'He's a nice guy; he's easy to get along with; friendly with everyone. Some women cleaners call him *stout-baas*.'

'What does *stout-baas* mean?'

Dolly chuckled. 'You're serious you don't know what it means? It means a white married guy who sleeps with the domestic working for them. But it's now being used for any man who can be naughty or flirtatious with women.'

'Okay. And how old can he be?'

'He should be mid or late-fourties; he says he's a dried fruit because he looks

younger.'

Rabeka found this amusing.

'He must be married, with children, my age,' Rabeka guessed.

'He told people here that he's divorced, but some people say he's lying he has a wife and children in Bloemfontein. Last year a woman who said she was his wife came here and asked: "Who's Busi?" and we said: "there's no Busi in this department" And she walked out saying: "Tell that bitch I'm going to get her the hit-men." But bra Hloms later told us that the woman was his former girl-friend.'

Dolly's face ejected another smile. 'Why are you asking? Are you interested in bra Hloms?'

Rabeka giggled. 'No. Hlama said to me this morning, when we met at the lift: "*Hei wena*, don't get too close to the boss, Busi will kill you!' She was speaking in siShangane, and I had to ask other people to translate for me.'

'You've met Busi, *neh*?'

'Yes, I met her during the media day when they performed snippets of "Maru".' Rabeka recalled that day she found Mahlomola making love to Busi in his office during lunch.

On the second Friday of September, a week after the end of the show, Rabeka was sitting with Dolly at her table; Dolly was finishing typing Rabeka's weekly report. Rabeka received a phone from the switchboard, inquiring if her visitors could be sent through to her office by the security. She was delighted to be told that the visitors were Sbu and Patience.

The ecstatic delight of seeing one another was mutual. She introduced them to Dolly before she took them to the cafeteria where they would have tea.

Patience told her she looked more mature, and she gladly received the complement.

'You did well by coming this week,' Rabeka told enchanted listeners, 'if you had come next week you wouldn't find me because I'll be attending a computer literacy course.'

'I envy you, my friend,' responded Patience.

'So how's everything guys?' Rabeka wanted to be updated.

'In two weeks,' Sbu took over from Patience, 'we are going to perform at Derdepoort High School; that high school of bad-mannered students...'

'Who's doing the part of Jaluza's mother?' inquired Rabeka.

Patience pointed to herself with a fore-finger. 'It's me!'

'You must work hard, girl,' Rabeka warned Patience, 'I've set a high standard!' They laughed.

'Bra Gooshkah says if you're interested in being part of the group, the door is still open,' Patience told her.

'Tell Gooshkah, to keep the job,' Rabeka's smile had faded out, 'if at all it's a job! Tell him I'm happier where I am!'

Just before they left, Patience took out two copies of two newspapers and showed Rabeka some stories and pictures taken during the Drug Day.

'Oh look at our picture with the Mayoress!' said Rabeka with a high pitched voice.

'You're photogenic, my friend!' Patience said.

'Can I make photocopies?' asked highly thrilled Rabeka.

'Bra Gooshkah said you can have them.'

'I'll take them! I need them for my CV! Tell him I'm thankful, but I won't come back to the group!'

Thirty minutes later she strolled with them out of the building. She gave Sbu a rib-hurting bear-hug and kissed Patience. With dewy eyes she waved at them before they crossed the street. She gazed at them until they crossed the street; when they saw her standing at the spot where they had left her, they waved at her vigorously and she waved back.

She thought as she got out of the lift, stepping towards her office: *I'm lying to myself, another part of me wants to go and do 'Drugs Don't Pay' for Derdepoort High; it'll be fulfilling to perform a piece of drama that changes lives.*

Dolly handed Rabeka her report.

'Thanks Dol! I'm going to type my next report because I'll be computer literate after next week.'

Dolly smiled at Rabeka. 'Did you have a good time with your friends?'

'Yes!'

'Did you tell them you've won the State Theatre's Marketing Award?'

'Yes! They were absolutely delighted!'

Rabeka showed Dolly the story and pictures about the Drug Day.

Dolly studied the newspaper clips; pointing at the picture, her smile climaxed with laughter. 'Is that you, Reebs?'

'Yes!'

'And this is the Mayoress of the City of Tshwane?'

'Yes!'

Dolly proffered her right palm to Rabeka. 'Get into this...!' She gave Rabeka a lively congratulatory hand-shake.

'You've a great future as an artist!'

'Thank you Dolly!'

'And who's this guy?'

'He's Gooshkah Baloi, the director and owner of the company.'

Dolly glanced at the articles again and looked at Rabeka with awe. 'You should have acted in the drama you're promoting!'

Rabeka folded the paper clips. 'Those guys have touched something deep inside me.'

'What is that?'

'My dream. I'm just doing this job because my parents do not like my career as a performing artist. But I'll never lose my dream.'

'Go for it Reebs! You have what it takes! Here you're just marking time!'

While attending a week-long computer course, Rabeka received an SMS from Mahlomola: *How R U apple-tart? I hope you're enjoying the course. C U when U come back.* During the last day of the course she received another SMS from him telling her that he would be away on a week-long seminar sponsored by the Department of Arts and Culture, and that he would see her towards the end of the month.

On that last Friday at 15h00 Rabeka walked into her office and found Dolly alone, preparing to leave. Rabeka had returned from the media room where she had been watching some corporate videos.

'Where are the guys?' inquired Rabeka.

'During month-end that's what happens. Hlamarisa has gone shopping; and the guys often go to a bar for a drink, with their journalists friends. They call the practice of spending a part of their earnings, 'taking air of the salary.'

Rabeka chuckled. 'It's good that other guys aren't here, because I want to ask you something, Dolly. Bra Hloms is inviting me for lunch tomorrow. Should I have said "No!"?''

'No, you can't say "No!" Because having lunches is part of his job. He once invited me for a working lunch.'

'But he has been behaving in a manner that makes me uncomfortable. Last week he asked me to help in his office. He had said he wanted to test my knowledge of computer literacy. We had food, and drinks and everything was okay, as I was working on the Excel programme. He told me that he had been overworking himself and suddenly he removed his shirt and said: 'Here is an ointment; please apply it to my back.'

'No that was not right.' Dolly paused for a while. 'You said "No!"?''

'Yes!!'

'You just have to continue being firm but polite to his advances. I believe time will come when he'll give up, if he's trying to be a *stout-baas*. Go with him for that working lunch. You're a strong girl; I know you can handle him. I trust you, Reebz.'

28 Mahlomola raised his glass of juice. 'To the success of the marketing award you've just won!'

Rabeka giggled. Their glasses touched, and they drank. He had taken her to one of Pretoria's classy restaurants, Donatos.

'Last time when I was here,' said Mahlomola, 'I saw the Minister of Finance with his girl-friend.'

Their order was soon ready and they began to eat.

'I just want to understand my subordinates,' he told her. 'So eating out with them is my leadership style. And by the way this is part of celebrating your success.'

'Thanks bra Hloms. And how long will that take.'

'Perhaps an hour.'

They finished their food and he ordered dessert; they ate it and finished it.

'We can go now,' said Mahlomola.

'Are you taking me to the taxis?'

'Yes. But want us to pass via my flat. For further nitty-gritties; and part two entertainment.'

She glanced at her wrist-watch. 'Bra Hloms, I must go home.'

'Please don't stress, Reebzah! Today, I'm going to drop you at your place.

Remember: you're the toast of the Director of Marketing; when we celebrate there should be no hurry; no stress, please.'

She wanted to say 'No!' but she changed her mind, recalling Dolly's words: *You're a strong girl; I know you can handle him.*

'I did my MBA in Marketing at Harvard in the US,' continued Mahlomola as they walked out of the restaurant. 'So please feel free to ask me any question about marketing.'

Fifteen minutes later he entered the parking lot of an up-market block of flats. She observed his face brightening up as they ambled into his flat. It was clearly high-income building one of those flats with swimming pools, rockeries, and braai places.

He held her hand as they entered the foyer, and she did not object or stiffen her hand.

After they had entered his spacious lounge he gestured. 'Reebzah, make yourself comfortable!'

She sat on the couch while he was standing. She saw him inserting the bundle of keys into the pocket of his jacket; he dropped the jacket on another couch and walked to what she had presumed to be the bathroom.

She had an urge to take the bundle of keys, and she snappily took them out of the pocket of the jacket and threw them in her hand-bag. She did not know why she must do such a thing, but the compulsion was too strong to be resisted. *This is stealing!* she heard a voice inside her but she steeled her conscience.

He returned in an upbeat mood. 'What can we drink?'

'No, I'm still full.'

'Can I play the CD? What kind of music do you like? Pop? Jazz? Caribbean? Jamaican? Tell me!'

'No, don't play any music for me.'

He moved over to her couch. He turned towards her. 'Reebzah, you're a brilliant girl. That's why you have won the marketing award.'

'Thanks for the complement.'

'But as a person, as a young woman, you stir and revive that biology, deep within me.'

He giggled.

She gave him a black look.

'What do you mean bra Hloms?'

'If you're a cleaver girl, you can read between the lines.'

'You've just said I'm a brilliant girl. But I can't read between your lines.'

'Baby you know I've been swallowing saliva since my eyes landed on you. Do I now make sense?'

'No!'

'Okay let me tell you straight. I desire you! You're the butterfly of my heart. When I interviewed you I just felt that my chemistry and yours would make a hell of a fire! You were killing me with your charm, babe! Very much! That's why the first interview was short.'

Rabeka kept quiet.

'Remember,' Mahlomola continued, 'You've worked for only three weeks but you've received a full salary. Who did that? Me! I've entertained you as part of my job, but you can entertain me a little, as a way of saying: "Thank you boss."'

Rabeka bowed and contained her forehead in her palms, leaning on her knees. She heaved sigh.

He tapped her knuckles with his middle finger. 'Com'n Reebza! Cheer up, girl! How much do you earn? R6 000? I can promote you to be my PA and double the figure. Because I've powers to hire and fire, you see. I used to have a white PA. If you're my PA, you can have a car, a cell-phone allowance, and other fringe benefits, if only you act

like... if you're a clever girl. You are from a rural area, and girls from such places do not come to sleep in the cities. You'll be visiting your mother, driving a nice sexy car. A girl from Nobody will be a Somebody worth pointing a finger at!' he smiled at her. 'Am I making sense?'

'No!'

'Why?'

She kept quiet.

He brushed her shoulder. 'What are you thinking about?'

'Nothing!'

She would not tell him that she was thinking about the temptation of Jesus by the devil: *If you are the Son of God...*

'So if I were you I'd jump at the opportunity.'

'What opportunity?'

'Com'on Reebzah, you're a mature girl.'

Suddenly he stood up, smiling. 'Look at me chick. I'm healthy,' he patted his stomach. 'I don't have the BEE-tummy. And I don't smoke. There's no passion killer. So come let's have a hell of a time you'll never forget! An experienced jockey must teach a young thing how to be saddled. Young studs have energy, but we older horses have the skill and art. The reason BYTs -beautiful young things crave us is not because we spoil them with money and other material things, no! We give them what young men can never ever give them, because our things have travelled many kilometers further than theirs. So,' he gestured towards his bedroom, 'everything is ready, waiting for you to take a first step towards fame.'

She shook her head. 'No, Mr Mofokeng, I cannot be your sleeping mate! Even for ten million rands!'

Smiling, he sidled closer to her and tried to touch her cheek, but she turned her face in the opposite direction. He brushed her shoulder.

She moved away from him. 'Please don't touch me, *Ntate* Mofokeng!' she snapped at him. 'If you touch again me I'm going to scream!'

'Now you've spoilt what could have been delicious.'

'Let me go home, Mr Mofokeng.'

Mahlomola smiled at her. 'Don't stress Reebzah. You're my guest and I'll do my best to entertain you.'

He stood up. 'Let me take something out of the fridge. We've been talking for a long time, it's time to wet our throats. You know I always lock my fridge because I don't want my helper to help herself too much.'

He searched in the pocket of his jacket. 'I can't find the keys of the house.'

She had blundered by taking his keys, Rabeka thought.

'Let me check here on the couch,' said Mahlomola.

She stood up and he checked. He also looked under the couch.

'Well, you will have to be my guest, until I find them.'

Snow she regretted taking them.

'Okay, you'll sleep the guest room. Would you like to have a bath?'

'No, you have it first!'

Suddenly a smile came back to his face. He was delighted that the loss of the house bundle of keys had made the impossible, possible. He knew she had fallen for his bait. He

would take away the key of the guest room and he would sneak into the bed she'd be sleeping on, and the rest would be history! He pictured her tamely lying on his hairy chest the next morning...

He remembered that in his culture a woman or a girl says 'No!' when in fact she's saying: 'Push me a little; I enjoy it!' So he walked to the bathroom whistling Ringo Mandlinkosi's 'Sthandwa sam'.

In hurry to finish bathing Mahlomola opened the bath's mixing-tap to the maximum. Rabeka grabbed her hand, removed her shoes and tip-toed towards the door, with bated breath. When she had arrived at the door, she listened attentively. Mahlomola was humming in the bathroom. Rabeka gingerly opened the door, put the bundle of keys down, and closed the door behind her.

29 Rabeka hurried away from the flat, glancing at all directions, dialling a metred taxi on her cell-phone. Within two minutes the cab arrived and whisked her away to Mamelodi. She told the driver she was in a terrible hurry, and he cooperated. When she was half-way her cell-phone rang; Mahlomola was calling; she cut the call.

When Mahlomola realised he had been duped by the girl he had regarded as a village girl, he was very angry. His heart wanted to burst. He changed into track-suits and tackies, got into his German-made car, and cruised around the block, searching hawk-eyed. He was angry with himself for having trusted a girl who had showed nothing but reluctance and resistance to go to bed with him. He felt she had given him a thumb to suck, as people said in his language.

Rabeka strutted towards the house furtively glancing backward. After a loud knock she entered and heaved a sigh, clutching at her handbag. Thabang and her mother were watching TV. She greeted them and walked to her bedroom. When Thabang noticed that Rabeka looked tense she followed her. Rabeka sat on the bed and contained her face with her palms and sighed.

Thabang sat next to her. 'What's the problem RB?'

Rabeka sighed again.

Thabang held Rabeka's arm. 'Has anything gone wrong between you and your boss?'

'Yes.'

'Let me call *mma*.' 'Mma!'

Thabang's mother entered and sat on an easy chair. 'Is there any problem?'

'Yes. Speak RB, we're listening,' said Thabang.

She told them all what happened. Thabang and her mother kept exchanging glances as she related the incident. When she had finished Thabang's mother kept quiet.

'Child of my sister what's happening?,' said Thabang's mother at last. 'Have you bad luck or what?'

'I don't have bad-luck, aunt Lobisa!'

'Then what is it?'

'I don't know!'

'It's another trial,' said Thabang. 'Eish! Satan doesn't tire easily *eh*?'

'If you weren't that kind of a stiff Christian,' said Thabang's mother, 'I would tell

you to go very far, to those who can throw the bones and fix your life.'

Thabang put her hand on Rabeka's shoulder. 'So how are you going to solve the problem?'

'I don't know. I'm still thinking over it.'

Thabang's mother left the bedroom.

Rabeka lifted her head. 'I can't work under a lustful boss. I'm resigning,' said Rabeka.

'No, RB!' chided Thabang in a hushed tone. 'You must persevere! You're a woman. People swallow all sorts of terrible things just keep the pot on the stove.'

'No!' insisted Rabeka. 'Life will never be the same again, at work. How are we going to look at each other? Are we going to pretend that nothing went wrong? If I don't resign I may open a door for him to keep trying again and again, using different methods.'

That first Sunday of the month, Rabeka went to church; her aim was to tell the church counsellors about what had actually happened. Towards the end of the service the pastor made an appeal to the congregation: 'If you've any problem come and share your burden with Jesus!' People shuffled towards the space between the first row and the pulpit.

Rabeka hesitated; she had changed her mind. *No I'm not going to tell anyone, it'll be too painful as I tell the story, she thought. What if they say if I go to the lion's den I should expect to be mauled by the beast? And I know they are going to say I should forgive him and pray for him.*

When she came back from church she found that Women of Society of which Thabang's mother was a member, were meeting at Thabang's home. As usual the women had read the minutes, discussed matters arising, new matters, collected monthly premiums, agreed about the date of next meeting and venue and closed the meeting. As Rabeka entered the gates they were having refreshments, which included food, cool-drink and some beers and wines. Hours later as some imbibers began to be soused they sang and danced and sang along to the CD player.

Rabeka and Thabang were passing through the lounge to sit and chat on the lawn when one woman stopped them and grabbed Rabeka by her hand. 'I heard of your problem with your boss, child of my cousin,' said a drunk woman, making an effort to sound sober. The woman hiccupped, cupped her mouth and apologised. 'Let me give you a tip; if your boss says let me see...' She gestured towards Rabeka's pubic area, 'you don't say "no" because you want to eat; you just close your eyes and give him what he's asking for.'

'Are you serious aunt Ramadimetja?' asked Thabang.

'Yes!' the woman turned to Rabeka. 'God has given you what He hasn't given to a man; so use the gift and live a better life.'

Thabang and Rabeka exchanged shocked glances.

'I know of a woman...' continued the woman, 'she used to live on the third street from this one; she has now gone to stay at a posh suburb; she's now driving a Pajero because she didn't say "no" when the boss said let me see...'

Rabeka shook her head. 'I'm not going to sell my soul so cheaply.' Thabang pulled Rabeka by her arm and went with her to the lawn.

Rabeka's cell-phone rang; Mahlomola called. 'I cannot speak to you, Mr Mofokeng,' she told him; she was surprised she was not angry with him. 'I'm at a family occasion... you

can hear the noise, I'm sure.'

'Okay I'll call you this evening,' said Mahlomola. 'And please don't switch off your phone.'

In the evening when Mahlomola called Rabeka had switched off her cell-phone.

On that first Monday of the month Mahlomola arrived early at his desk and called Rabeka. When she did not answer his call, he decided to try an hour later. He tried to call Rabeka many times during the day, without success; he had even tried SMSes. He gave up hope in the afternoon. He was really getting frustrated.

After finishing cleaning the house Rabeka decided to read a women's magazine which had on the cover a picture of a famous TV hostess, Noleen Maholwana-Sangqu. She had just started a page head-lined, "Five Inspirational Women," facing eye-to-eye, this buxom icon, who had always fascinated her, when her cell-phone rang.

Patience was calling. 'I decided to give you a surprise visit at your place last Saturday and your cousin told me you have gone out with your boss. How was the outing?

'Something seriously wrong happened.'

'What happened?'

'I cannot tell you on telephone.'

'Can I see you today? I'm not attending rehearsals.'

'No. Not today. Friday afternoon will suit me.'

'It's okay my friend. But can you hint at the problem?'

'No; wait for Friday.'

After speaking to Patience, Rabeka sent TM an SMS: *Things are bad. Resigned from State Theatre -pls call.*

He called her immediately.

'Reeba, you cannot go on like this,' TM was confrontational for the first time, 'You can't keep quitting jobs because someone wants to sleep with you! Why don't you just accept that the whole world is corrupt and try to make the best out of it?'

'Believe me, bra T, it wasn't easy to come to this conclusion. I was beginning to like the job, thinking it will give me some breathing space from my parents. I was beginning to see the job as an alternative career. Now my boss sees in me a sex-object...' She burst into tears. 'And please don't tell me it's a way of getting me out of the comfort zone. Don't tell me I mustn't run away from the giants of the valley!'

TM paused for a short while. 'Have you indeed resigned?'

'Yes! I can't work under a sex-pest of a boss. He'll either revenge by firing me or keep trying his lecherous tricks.'

'And why do you tell me after you've resigned? You should have...'

'I wasn't ready to speak to you. I'm sorry bra T. I hope you'll understand.'

TM did not respond.

Minutes after TM had spoken to her, aunt Mpule sent comforting words, promising to pray with fasting.

Tuesday morning, after failing to speak to Rabeka at 10h00, Mahlomola thought of a plan. He felt Dolly could help him out. That week Saki was not at the office as

Mahlomola had delegated him to attend a theatre marketing course.

He called Dolly to his office. 'Dol, I want you to help me on a sensitive assignment,' he told Dolly. 'A misunderstanding has occurred between Reebbs and me. Please call her on my behalf, because she's not responding to my calls. I'm asking you because I'm aware Reebbs easily confides in you.'

'Okay bra Hloms,' said Dolly sympathetically.

'And whatever she says to you, it's confidential. Okay?'

'I know.'

Mahlomola told Dolly what actually happened, spicing it up by saying that the body language of Reebbs was sexually suggestive, and that according to his culture a man must not offend a woman, by ignoring her when she wanted to 'give him'. Dolly had always been loyal to Mahlomola to a fault; so much that she had been notoriously dubbed 'mpi-mpi' by uncompromising Hlamarisa. So Dolly did not hesitate to call Rabeka. Mahlomola had asked her to do the call in the vacant office; the one that was used by his PA.

'Bra Hloms says I should call you,' Dolly spoke to Rabeka. 'He looked very stressed. Has anything gone wrong on Saturday?'

'What did he say he did to me?'

'He said he was playing with you and you ran out of his flat...'

'It's a very long story Dolly.'

'Listen Reebbs, I'm coming to your place. Can we meet today?'

'Yes, we can meet at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom Park, the park at the entrance of Mamelodi.'

'Can I come within 45 minutes?'

'It's okay!'

30 Dolly drove there and she found Rabeka waiting for her. Rabeka told Dolly all that had happened.

'It's unfortunate that things had to end that way,' said Dolly, 'I'm very sorry. Perhaps I'm to blame because...'

'No, you're not to blame Dolly.'

'I was a strong girl, I've handled bra Hloms, but now I've no job. I'm resigning!'

'No, you can't do that! You haven't even worked for three months. What'll your parents say?'

'Yes my parents will not like what I've decided to do. But I can't work at a place where I have said "No!" to a boss who wants to seduce me.'

'But you have rights Reebbs. There's a law against sexual harassment. And *ehr...*'

'The law is a piece of paper that can't change the day-to-day emotions of people. The law can't take Bra Hloms desire out of his mind. That's why during apartheid days when there was a law against sex between blacks and whites people of different races still made love.'

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While Dolly had gone to speak to Reeb, Mahlomola entered the office of Marketing Specialists without knocking.

'The journalists are calling me in connection with the misunderstanding between me and Reeb. Who tipped them off?' He pointed and waved a forefinger between Podile and Mike. 'I suspect one of you guys. I hear you have journalist friends.'

Mike shook his head. 'No bra Hloms. We didn't ...'

'Anyway what I came to tell you is,' he lowered his tone, 'if any newspaper calls you just say "no comment!"'

Seconds after he had left, Mike stood up with open palms and beat his right palm with his left fist.

'Serves you right, you stinking sugar-daddy!'

Mike, Podile and Hlamarisa jeered.

Hlamarisa stretched her neck and protruded her tongue towards Mike. 'Hey Reeb's permanent body guard, where were you when uncle Dried Fruit took her to his flat?'

The gossip had travelled swiftly on a complicated conveyor belt from tongues to ears, and again tongues to other ears. Thabang had told her mother who told aunt Kedibone, who was eavesdropped on by a colleague who knew someone at the State Theatre, who later discussed it during tea-time. So although Mahlomola had vaguely referred to a misunderstanding between him and Reeb, and Dolly was secretive, the staff soon got to know about the juicy details.

'Uncle Dried Fruit has power and money and he's beyond my *body-guardial* duties,' reasoned Mike.

Hlamarisa chuckled. 'I once told Reeb "If you rush you'll crush." Now look at what has happened! I knew it would end this way! And I once warned her to stay away from bra Hloms. *Hee* you guys,' she continued. 'When I tried to blow the whistle you said I was speaking petty politics!'

Podile and Mike exchanged sheepish glances.

'Reeb why aren't you answering my calls?' Mahlomola called on Wednesday morning. 'And why aren't you coming to work?'

'It's better to resign than be fired!'

'Who says I'll fire you?'

'You said you've powers to hire and fire! So what'll stop you from firing me because I'm refusing to say "yes" to your advances?'

'I don't know where do you get all those things. Reeb, please come back to work. Gossip has spread that you've resigned because I am a sex-pest. The newspapers are calling me. If you come back, you'll prove them wrong. Then you can resign a month later after the controversy has died down. Please Reeb, I beg you. And if the newspapers call you just say "no comment!"'

'Why should I say "no comment?"'

'What will my wife say if the story appears in the newspapers? How will my kids react? They are as old as you are.'

'It's interesting that you now have a wife and kids. All the time you were just an old bachelor who called himself a "dried fruit".'

'Please co-operate Reeb! I'll deposit R15 000 into your bank account. Is that...?'

'I'm not that cheap!'

'Okay! Thirty thou?'
She cut off the line.

That first Friday of October as Rabeka had diarised, Patience met her at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom Park. Rabeka told her all what happened, starting from the Denatos restaurant until they went to his flat.

'Why do all these guys want to sleep with you?' asked Patience.

'Only their devils know.'

Rabeka kept quiet.

'Is your face saying,' continued Patience, "'Hey come and bang me?'" *Mh?*

'Don't be silly Patience!'

Patience brushed Rabeka's arm endearingly. 'So what are your future plans, girl of strong character?'

'Still planning my next move.'

Rabeka recalled Dolly's words: *You're a strong girl*, a day before she went out with Mahlomola.

'And how was the performance of your play at Derdepoort High?' inquired Rabeka.

'It was great! The students could relate to Jahuza, and they applauded continually. And guess what happened after the show. Most of the bad students wanted to have drama lessons. The headmaster was simply bowled over that the boys' negative energy would be used positively.'

'Has Gooshkah agreed to teach them drama?'

'He says he'll go on Saturday mornings.'

'It's wonderful when the behaviour of bad people change because of theatre.'

Patience updated Rabeka about other performers, and other activities.

'Friend can we meet at the House of Glory, this Sunday?' said Patience as they sauntered to the taxi-route.

'What's special?'

'Nothing special. You got me interested in all this church business so you can't say "no!" And a new church building has been opened near Bronkhorstspuit old road.'

'Okay I'll come.'

'I can promise you, you'll enjoy every minute. There's a church band, the people are nice and there are many interesting activities, projects and businesses.'

'Like what?'

'The church has a driving school, a computer school, a crèche, and I heard once a month there is a workshop about tenders and how to write proposals. Oh yes, there's a church choir, and I'm sure there's drama, if it's not there we can start it.'

'I'm glad you're so excited about church.'

31 That second Sunday of October Rabeka went to the House of Glory church as Patience had invited her. She found Patience waiting at the church entrance and they sat together in the third row from the front. At the door the parishioners were welcomed and given programmes by smiling ushers wearing purple shirts and blouses and black trousers. The church band was still connecting the instruments behind the preacher's podium.

For the first few minutes Rabeka craned her neck looking around the massive church from the left to the right, from the back to the front, from the floor tiles to the ceiling. She could count about eighty rows of white plastic chairs. Rabeka was impressed with the decorations.

Rabeka heard the drummer signalling that the band was ready. She listened to the band of five people: the drummer, the lead guitarist, the bass player, an alto saxophone player, and a key-board player, playing a popular *Ke na le Modisa* (I have a Shepherd) without vocals. Rabeka found herself gazing at the key-board player, a light complexioned guy whose black dread-locks she felt, contrasted well with his white Chinese-collared silken shirt.

Hereafter the lead singer, a broad-chested woman, took the microphone; rendering several songs, she was supported by three young men and three young women. At the end of the praise and worship session Rabeka saw flamboyant Pastor Titus, wearing a white three-piece suit with a white shirt, a red tie and white shoes, attaching a cordless mini-microphone on the lapel of his jacket. He told the congregation that he was 'bringing hugs and kisses from our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers' from Atlanta, where he was attending an international conference.

'What I've learned from America is: "Don't preach longer than 20 minutes. Stop when your listener still wants some more, so-that he should come back next Sunday!" Hallelujah!!'

The congregation applauded.

Rabeka was delighted to hear the pastor preaching about: *How to be successful in life*. What she could take home was: *A success attitude uplifts towards and altitude of excellence*, which she had written in her bible.

At the end of the sermonette the deacon asked those who were coming to the church for the first time to stand up. Rabeka was one of the 15 people who were appreciated with a loud applause. Those people were given green forms to complete and were asked to sit in the first row from the front.

When Rabeka was through with the recruitment process, she walked toward the door. Patience was waiting for her outside.

'High sistah!' she heard someone calling behind her.

When she turned she saw the key-board player walking closer to her. She gasped.

'Hallo *sistah*,' said the guy smiling. 'I saw you standing as one of the people coming to the church for the first time.' he proffered a open palm. 'Welcome!'

'Thank you...'

'My name is Mashudu Mudau. And what's your name.'

'I'm Reeb's Maru-a-pula.'

'I'm delighted to know you. Did you enjoy the service?'

'Yes! One of the songs I've enjoyed is: *I'm only moved by the word of God*

Hallelujah!

'I'm pleased to get positive feedback.'

They arrived at a notice-board crowded by people taking telephone numbers of flats available, musical instruments wanted or sold, jobs wanted and available and many other things.

Mashudu attached the leaflets with drawing pins. 'It's a late item.'

'Is it a vacant position?' inquired Rabeka.

'No. It's a call for auditions, they are looking for...'

'Call for auditions?'

'Yes. Actors who can sing and dance are wanted for a musical play.'

'Acting is my passion!'

Mashudu paused and gave Rabeka a look bursting with curiosity. He smiled. 'I wish you well in your auditions.'

'Thank you brother!'

'And please give me feedback next week.'

'I will.'

'It was a pleasure meeting you. Bye!'

Mashudu left Rabeka at the notice board, taking some particulars. She was the last person at the notice-board.

'Why did you spend so much time with Mashudu?' Rabeka heard Patience speaking from behind her. 'What were you talking about?'

'This item. It's a call for auditions.'

'Auditions for what?'

'They're looking for actors who can sing and dance. Come, let's attend the auditions.'

'I'm not yet ready for musicals.'

Rabeka folded a piece of paper on which she had written, and inserted it in her bible.

'Mashudu is a nice guy,' said Rabeka, 'I wonder if he's attached emotionally.'

'I don't think he can be available in such a big church where there are so many young women and girls and very few guys...I mean dudes. Tell me Reeb, are you interested in him?'

'I'll be a liar to say 'No!' He's sexy; he's a charmer. I wish he had asked for my cell numbers. To be honest I have a crush on him.'

'You've a crush on him? Don't be crazy Reeb!'

'Listen, if you rush you're going to crush.'

At Thabang's home that evening Rabeka, Thabang and her mother relaxed in the lounge after watching the news.

'RB, how was church?' inquired Thabang.

'I had a good time at the church. The church is big and the people are nice and smart. They sing just like African-Americans. Patience told me that a big black church in Atlanta in America has helped the church to start and to complete the building.'

Thabang nodded and smiled. 'It sounds an interesting church.'

'It is! And guess what I found: an advert about auditions for a musical play.'

'Are you interested in it? You know your parents are skeptical about such things.'

'What must I do? I can't sit at home waiting for job I'm not sure of.'
Thabang's mother looked quizzically at Rabeka. 'I just hope it's not the same kind of a job where your boss will want to taste your snuff.'
They all laughed.

'If it happens,' said Rabeka, 'I'll see how to handle it. I can't sit at home, afraid that men will want to seduce me.'

Rabeka waited for the moment she would share the exciting news about Mashudu, with Thabang.

'I'm delighted,' said Thabang, 'to hear that at last there's a man in your life. But what are you going to do if he will choose to treat you as just a friend?'

'I'm going to charm him. I think I've laid a good foundation. But Patience warned me that if I have a crush on Mashudu, I'm rushing, and I'll crush.'

Thabang kept quiet for a moment. 'What if Patience herself is crazy about the guy?'

'I never thought about it,' said Rabeka.

Rabeka smiled broadly, her eyes glinting with ardour. 'When he said to me: "It was a pleasure meeting you..." I wished he could have hugged, or kissed me on my cheek, or even better, on my lips.'

They laughed.

Thabang smiled at Rabeka and pulled a face. 'So you're sure the guy isn't just a male wearing a pair of trousers saying: "I love you, I love you."'

Late that Sunday Rabeka sent TM an SMS: *Please call me. Gr8 news 2 tell u.*

TM called without delay. 'Yes, Reeb, what's new? Are you succeeding against the giants of the valley?'

'Bra T, the ship is now getting out of a safe harbour.'

'That's interesting! Tell me more.'

'I'll be attending auditions for a musical play!'

'Fantastic! When?'

'Next week Saturday on 15th.'

'Where?'

'At Ga-Rankuwa Hall.'

'And what's the title of the musical?'

'The Journey towards Freedom.'

'It sounds like a great project. Go for your dream, Reeb!'

'Thanks bra T!'

'You know, if something is within easy reach then it's not a dream. A dream must stretch you, cost you, and involve some risk!'

'Thanks bra T. You always have something uplifting to say.'

TM chuckled.

'I wish,' continued Rabeka, 'you can convince my parents to accept my career. And *uhm*... I'm heeding your advice that I should always prepare thoroughly for my assignments. So I decided to spend a week before the auditions at the Es'kia Mphahlele library, browsing books on theatre.'

'I'm impressed with your infectious enthusiasm. Good luck!'

'Thanks bra T!'

Part Three

1 At 08h00 that Saturday morning Rabeka arrived an hour early at Ga-Rankurwa Hall, the auditions venue. Passing through a room with many chairs she walked straight towards a door where she knocked.

She found three guys stapling the forms she guessed were for the auditions. One of them, a slim guy wearing a black beret told her to sit in the waiting area. A round-faced, slightly burly man wearing a cap saying 'Yale Talent' smiled and gestured towards her. 'I like people who are hungry for work.'

The other two chuckled as giggling Rabeka closed the door.

A few minutes later Rabeka saw a white guy in his early thirties entering; he sat next to her.

The guy smiled and proffered a hand. 'I'm Zeb Nel.'

Rabeka sized up the friendly, clean-shaven man with a prominent nose and a pony-tail.

'Reeb's Maru-a-pula,' Rabeka introduced herself, 'Your name again?'

'Zeb is my first name and Nel is my surname.'

Rabeka nodded with a smile.

'My full name is Zerubabbel,' Zeb continued, 'It's a Jewish name, my mother is Jewish my father is Afrikaner.'

'Delighted to know you Zeb.'

'Your surname again?'

'Maru-a-pula.'

'You've a difficult surname. What does it mean?'

'It means clouds of rain. Also here for auditions?'

'Nope. I'm here to submit an apology for my sister.'

'Why don't you audition for a white male? The advert for auditions says also white women and white guys are invited.'

'I've never acted before. Dancing yes, I can do it.'

'It's a musical; so I guess your dancing will be relevant.'

'Well I'll just sit and watch, and see if I've got what it takes.'

'You never know until you try.'

A Rasta hair-styled man came and introduced himself to Zeb and Rabeka as Zakhele; a tallish light-complexioned young woman who said her name was Millicent, added to the number. Moments later Busi arrived, and Rabeka was amazed that Busi was not strange towards her. They talked like. At that moment more people poured in and sat quietly, scanning the people, trying to find a friendly face.

Zakhele chatted to Rabeka and Millicent who had moved to a corner to have a quick bite of the popular junk food they had bought. When Millicent went to throw away the rubbish Zakhele remained talking to Rabeka. Soon Rabeka saw Sbu and she beckoned him over to them.

Rabeka introduced Sbu to Zakhele. 'We were in the same drama company; Gooshkah's group.'

The two guys shook hands; but Zakhele did not look pleased to meet Sbu.

In the midst of chatter and movement, Rabeka saw the man wearing a black beret

entering the waiting room. He gave Rabeka some square pieces of paper the size of half a palm, on which were written the numbers one to thirty; he asked her to hand the papers out.

'Those who come when the cards are finished, tell them to come next week,' the man instructed. 'We have to limit the numbers.'

Rabeka held the last piece of paper she saw a petit woman, wearing thin dreadlocks to which beads were added and the ends. She told Rabeka that her name was Dudu. Chatty Dudu sat next to Busi who was charmed by her character.

Within a few minutes, the guy wearing a beret came and gave Rabeka the auditions forms to hand to the others. They were given thirty minutes to complete them.

As Rabeka distributed the forms, Busi whispered to Dudu 'Is she part of management?'

'I don't know, ask her,' responded Dudu.

At 11h00 the auditions started. Millicent was the first to be called. Rabeka expected to be called after Millicent but it never happened. It was soon lunch-time. After lunch they called others.

Smiling Zeb emerged from the auditions room, and waved at Rabeka who quickly walked over to him.

'How was it?' inquired Rabeka.

'They say they like my voice,' said elated Zeb. 'And the fact that I can dance.'

'Great!'

'And thanks for encouraging me, Reebbs. Remember you said: "You never know until you try."'

'I'm pleased to hear that.'

Zeb gave Rabeka a hug and left.

Dudu emerged from the rehearsal room, walked to Rabeka and gave her a tight hug. 'I just like you my girl, and I know we'll be in the cast together.'

'When are we going to know about the results?'

'They say by next Friday. God bless!'

'You too, sis Dudu!'

Rabeka was the last to be called. She was relaxed when she entered.

The cap-guy smiled at her. 'Have you heard of the saying: the first shall be the last and the last, the first?'

Rabeka chuckled.

'Welcome, Reebbs Maru-a-pula,' said the beret-guy. 'I'm Ringo Mabusela.'

Rabeka nodded coyly.

'The man the middle is the brain behind the show, the playwright, Morwa-pitsi Manamela.'

Morwa-pitsi and Rabeka nodded towards each other.

'And on the extreme right, is the man who's going to turn the recipe into a delicious meal, the Director, Sol Moraba!'

After giving a firm hand-shake, Sol glanced at a form which Rabeka had completed. 'I see that you've acted in and directed Timothy Matlamela's "The Dream Girl" in Limpopo Province. Who's this guy?'

'He's my former teacher, and a sort of my mentor. He came up with the project which helps young people to follow their dreams. So we produced a play based on the

workshop.'

Sol smiled at Rabeka. 'This is a piece of paper, anyone can fill glowing details; now we want to have a taste of how you can act.'

Ringo gave Rabeka the background of the play, that was to be rehearsed, before handing her a typed page.

'We want you to read the parts where we've marked x's with a red pen. You'll be enacting the roles of Nelson Mandela, and Winnie Mandela.'

She was given only five minutes to read through silently.

'Now read the first line. One! Two! Three!'

'I have cherished an ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities,' Rabeka read, 'It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die!'

The panel exchanged glances and made quick notes.

Ringo smiled at Rabeka. 'For the second line, I'm a journalist interviewing you. Let's go for it! Mrs Mandela, how do you feel that your husband is now serving life imprisonment at Robben Island?'

'I am in fact relieved that my husband is serving life imprisonment. He could have received a death sentence. I am determined and my people are more than determined to fight against this oppressive regime until we win!' Rabeka raised her clenched fist, something that was not in the script. 'Amaaaaaaandlaaaaa!!'

Again, when she had finished reading, the three men scribbled some notes on their score sheets. Rabeka saw the playwright nodding and smiling at her. Sol asked Rabeka to perform a part she had once acted, and after thinking for a few seconds she rendered a piece from Gooshkah's 'Drugs Don't Pay.' Lastly Sol asked her to sing and she stood up, took a deep breath and sang her favourite gospel song: *What a mighty God we serve*.

2 That Sunday after church, Rabeka sauntered with Patience towards the gate.

Suddenly Rabeka grabbed Patience by her hand. 'Please wait here. I just want to give Mashudu a quick feedback about the auditions.'

Rabeka found Mashudu giving some instructions to some leaders of the church choir. When Mashudu saw Rabeka standing a few metres away he excused himself and walked over to her. He smiled and she saw his dimples accentuated. 'How are you *sistah*?'

'I'm okay Shudu. You said I must give you feedback about the auditions I've attended yesterday.'

Rabeka felt she was tense, but because she was a performer she spoke clearly.

'Yes! How did it go?'

'Very well. The guys looked impressed.'

Rabeka could feel cold stares from other girls passing, directed at her.

'Reebs, I'm interested in the details. But I'm attending to this matter about an inter-denominational gospel-choirs festival. So I don't have time now.'

'Okay,' she said, her tone betraying her.

'But listen, I must talk to you sometime. I must get your numbers. Please write them on a piece of paper; I don't take my cell-phone to church on Sundays.'

She gave him a piece of paper on which she had written her cell numbers, and left hurriedly, as if she did not want to give him a chance to change his mind. She felt good that she had spoken to him. She felt the more she was with him the more she warmed to him; she spoke to him as if he were her best friend, for the first time addressing him as 'Shudu.' *I think the dude likes me! If he has my cell-numbers, he has me! This is surely more than friendship*, she thought as she walked over to Patience. *If this isn't love then what is it?*

When she strolled towards a newspaper shed on the street on the way to Thabang's home, she was attracted by a poster of a Sunday tabloid: *State Theatre sex-pest causes resignation of worker*. She bought the newspaper and read, holding her breath, her eyes searching for her name. *The head of Marketing at State Theatre....this newspaper is in possession of the name of the young woman ...in an exclusive interview...*

She was not surprised to see the article because a journalist had interviewed her a week ago.

During the new week, each day when her cell-phone rang she thought the call was from Mashudu; she was disappointed when on several occasions she heard a different voice. One of the calls she had received was from Dolly, informing her that Saki was the acting head of Marketing as Mahlomola was off sick, receiving psychological assistance. The consolation prize of the week was when Rabeka received a call on Thursday that her audition had been successful and that she should come for the first meeting two days later on Saturday 22 October.

On Friday she received a call from the chairman of the State Theatre Board. He said he was sorry about what had happened, and he inquired if she needed any counselling which would be paid for by the State Theatre. She said she was okay thanks to the support of the family and friends. He told her that the task team had recommended that she should be given a severance pay of the amount of the salary she was receiving. He said the CEO would call her within a week.

That Friday evening at home, Thabang asked if Mashudu had called her. Disappointed Rabeka had to tell him the truth. 'But I know he'll call me. He's a busy guy.'

'What sort of work is he doing?'

'He completing a medical degree.'

'So you'll be called "the doctor's girl-friend."'

'I don't know.'

She wasn't happy to have said: *I don't know*.

Rabeka glanced at her cell-phone. 'I must prepare for tomorrow -it's the first day of rehearsals,' she changed the subject.

If I don't hear from him again, she thought, I'll have to admit it was too good to be true. Can this be preparing me for some heart-break ahead?

3 That Saturday at 10h00, Rabeka was one of 13 performers, sitting on chairs arranged in an oval; in front of them sat Sol, and Ringo, sandwiching Morwa-pitsi. Rabeka was reminded of the first meeting of the 'Realise Your Dream' project when TM told them about the journey towards the Promised Land. There was an atmosphere of expectancy.

When Rabeka arrived ten minutes early, she sat on an empty chair between Busi and Dudu. She first spoke to Dudu who told her she was delighted to see her. Busi suddenly changed her seat and went to sit next to Zeb. Zakhele stood up, intending to sit next to Rabeka, but Sbu beat him.

"Congratulations that you made it! And welcome to the jungle called professional theatre." Sol, his trade-mark cap on his balding head, paused; he had been distracted. He saw Millicent walking towards him.

He stroked his beard. 'Millicent, haven't we told you that you were unsuccessful? Why are you here?'

'I...I just want to learn from others. I cannot sit at home and do nothing, bra Sol. Perhaps I can help in costumes or make-up, or something...'

'We don't have such positions. We haven't budgeted for...'

'Please bra Sol! You can send me to the shops to buy them food when they're busy.'

'No-no-no Millicent. We can't allow any person hanging around here. So please go away!'

Millicent began to sob. 'No bra Sol I cannot go home. Please let me just sit and listen!' Millicent wiped her tears and Sol looked on.

'Please let her stay, bra Sol!' appealed Rabeka.

'Yes, please!' Dudu lended a word of support.

Sol shrugged. 'Okay!'

Millicent, smiling with tears still in her eyes, went to pull a chair behind the chairs occupied by the cast, and sat quietly.

'Once more, welcome to the jungle called professional theatre,' resumed Sol. 'Any pilot will tell you that during take-off there's a point of no return: the run-way has all been used up. It's fly or die!'

Rabeka thought: *I wish my parents could accept that I have reached a point of no return, where I don't have to do any other job but acting and singing.*

'I also want to share these two principles with you: we all have to learn and to grow; when you stop growing you begin to rot. We all want to be winners, and a winner is a learner. When I was at Yale varsity in the US - I spent 18 months doing an intensive drama diploma - my tutor had stuck the following quotation on the walls in which we were rehearsing; it says: "A winner knows how much he still has to learn, even when he's considered an expert by others. A loser wants to be considered an expert by others, before he has learned enough to know how little he knows".'

Rabeka took out her pocket diary and a pen, and raised her hand. 'Can you repeat it bra Sol?'

'I'm going to stick it on the wall for the benefit of all of us. Motivational speakers often say: "Your attitude determines your altitude," - how high you'll go. I'm saying this because some of you have more experience than others; and you might have gone abroad

for festivals and workshops and scholarships. And those who know more may be arrogant and think they can't learn anything from the guy they regard as having little experience. I once worked with a girl who was fond of starting her sentences with: "When I was in Japan," and ending with "When I was in London."

They laughed.

'Another thing I've learnt from my tutor,' continued Sol, 'is that a student should always give more so that the teacher should prune and trim wherever necessary; the teacher always said, it was easier for him to prune than to stretch the tree. Does this make sense?'

A lot of the group members nodded.

'So, I'm challenging you to think big, grow big and act big. Exaggerate if you can! Never be satisfied with where you are, or what you know!'

They applauded.

'So far so good!'

Sol presented a summary of the play.

'Please read the scripts during the weekend and get a broad idea,' said Sol as Ringo handed the cast the scripts. "For the whole of next week we're going to do script-reading; I'll be making notes as a director, and Ringo will be thinking stage-managing. And the playwright...please tell them about your role Morwa!"

Morwa-pitsi coughed to clear his throat. 'I'm going to listen as you read, and make notes that could be inserted. If a dialogue line sounds a bit stilted or unnatural, I'm going to make changes.'

'And I'll be timing the script,' said Sol, 'If it's too long I'll recommend some cuts, and he'll re-write.'

As they went home the cast members talked about how they were impressed with Sol. Rabeka told Dudu that Sol had reminded him of TM and that she wished the two could meet and exchange their knowledge. Rabeka also said she was amused by Sol's habit of hitching up his pair of trousers, as he was dispensing with directorial advice and instructions.

A rumour did rounds that Ous-Joyce, his live-in girl-friend had persuaded him to reduce weight. As he was losing weight his trousers remained bigger for him. The only moment he didn't touch his trousers was when he was on the director's chair, his thighs astride, the chair turned backward; he often leaned forward, his arms resting on the backrest. It was rumoured that he was copying directing heavy-weights such as the Market Theatre's Barney Simon.

That evening Rabeka called TM and told him that they had been given scripts, and that the company had been funded by the Lottery fund.

'So you'll be earning big bucks eh?' said TM

'Yes. I've never earned R2 000 a week. God is great bra T.'

'I'm really happy for you, Reeb. Have you told your parents and aunt Mpule?'

'Yes.'

'Now let's talk the dream business. You'll agree with me that nobody said it's going to be easy!'

'I know!'

'Now you are getting deeper into the valley of giants, . I once told you there are two things you are certainly going to get as you walk further towards the Promised Land. Do you still remember them?'

'Yes; tears in my red eyes, and dirt under my fingernails.'

Later Aunt Mpule called her. 'I heard the good news from Teacher Matlamela.' Rabeka chuckled.

'God is good, we are celebrating with you, Rabbeh!' continued aunt Mpule, 'But remember there's a devil at every level. You know I'm not trying to scare you, I'm preparing you.'

'Thanks auntie!

4 That Sunday morning she awoke, thinking of Mashudu, wondering what had happened to the man she thought had deeper feelings than mere friendship towards her; she had no doubt that she had a special feeling towards him. It was strange that she should go to church looking forward to meeting a guy other than her Lord! She wished she could discuss these feelings with aunt Mpule whom she thought understood her; she had no doubt her adorable aunt would assure her that it was not a sin to wake up thinking about a guy rather than thinking about things holy.

The moment she entered the church her eyes searched until they found Mashudu. When he looked in the direction of the section of the church where she was sitting she felt he was looking at her, and wanted to wave. The House of Glory band lead the worship service. The lead singer, Victoria and six choristers, sang several songs. When she sang 'Only You are holy, Lord,' Mashudu lifted up his fingers, punched the keyboard with vengeance, leaned backwards, then suddenly forward, shaking his head, eyes closed, smiling. Some parishioners moved to tears, started to wipe their eyes; others raised their hands.

In the midst of the holiness Rabeka caught herself imagining things unholy: she pictured Mashudu's long fingers exploring her breasts and buttocks. Shocked by what was occupying her mind, which she had no doubt was not the mind of Christ, she cried tears of repentance.

After the service she walked straight to him in front of the instruments where she found him speaking to a group of teenagers - boys and girls. As she waited holding her bible, she felt that young women glanced at her with eyes that did not say things complimentary. Rabeka felt a gnaw of jealousy when she saw one of the girls standing along-side Mashudu, lightly embracing him. She wondered if the girl was showing off Mashudu as her conquest.

When he noted her presence, he smiled at her. 'Reeba, I'll be with you in a moment.'

All his admirers left except the girl, who gave Rabeka a broad smile.

Mashudu grasped the girl's hand. 'Reeba meet my cousin, Matodzi.'

Hugely relieved, Rabeka stretched her hand towards Matodzi, and they exchanged hand-shakes.

'Reeba is an actress,' Mashudu boasted.

'I know her,' said Matodzi.

'How do you know me?' asked Rabeka.

'I also wanted to ask the same question,' said Mashudu.

'I saw you during the Drug Day at the Central Sports Ground.'

Rabeka's eyes lit up. 'Were you there?'

'Yes,' Matodzi turned to Mashudu. 'She's a good actress this one; she acted the part of Jaluza's mother.'

Rabeka chuckled.

'I'm impressed Reebbs!' said Mashudu.

Matodzi left as Mashudu and Rabeka walked towards the parking lot.

Mashudu apologised for losing her cell numbers, 'Today I brought my cell-phone and I'll save your numbers directly. Please give me your numbers again.'

Rabeka gave him the numbers and she was delighted to see him saving them.

Rabeka felt it was the right moment to tell aunt Mpule about Mashudu; seeing him save her cell-numbers convinced her that he treasured their relationship; so she called her. Her aunt was overjoyed. 'It's good that you're in love, because you're still young to live like us oldies,' said aunt Mpule. 'But please keep the relationship pure; run away from any situation that will compromise who you really are.'

'Thanks auntie.'

'And one last piece of advice: don't be too available for him. Some days let him miss you. Don't hang around him so much that he can't even breathe without catching your scent.'

'Too much is too boring!'

'Exactly!'

5 That Monday of the last week of October, when the cast busied themselves with script-reading and discussion, Millicent came again and sat quietly at the back. Sol never became up-tight with her.

On Wednesday during lunch, Millicent smiled at Rabeka, gave her a bear-hug and a kiss on her cheek. 'Bra Sol has appointed me as an administrator and messenger. Thank you for asking bra Sol to let me stay; I don't know how to thank you.'

'It's okay. I'm just glad to have played a little role to help another child.'

'Reebbs, you're using three taxis to come for rehearsals,' said Millicent. 'If you want to save money and time, you can come and stay at my place. I'm sure there will be a time when we work until late.'

'Thanks for the offer, Millie; I'll speak to my aunt. But at the moment I'm still establishing myself at a new church. May be the best time will be sometime in November.'

For the cast, the director, the playwright and the stage manager the week never walked but ran: soon it was Friday afternoon. As Rabeka walked home from the taxi, she saw a newspaper headline: 'State Theatre Sex-pest Fired.' She did not buy the newspaper. She received a call from the State Theatre's CEO asking for her banking details; he told her that the amount of R6 000 would be deposited into her account

Her cell-phone rang again. It was Mahlomola, using a cell-number she did not recognise. 'So you chose to put my head on the chopping block?'

'No I didn't...'

'Okay, eat me because you've slaughtered me. And I know you got a lousy R6 000. You could have been R30 000 richer if you had cooperated...'
She cut him off.

On the last Saturday of the month at about 15h00, as Rabeka had diarised, Mashudu's metallic grey BMW automatic, picked her up in front of the gate of Thabang's home, which had become her home. It was their first date. As she strutted out of the house he walked to the passenger's side to open the door for her.

She was confident he would appreciate her new outfit: a brown very tight pair of pants and a mauve nylon blouse that tantalisingly showed her bra, with a purple lip-stick, and plaited hair with pitch-black extensions that were tied above her head, creating a style that formed an inverted pyramid.

Wearing a pair of deep-blue jeans and a sky-blue V-neck t-shirt, he extended a hand; but he changed his mind, and gave a tight bear-hug that climaxed in a kiss on her right cheek. For a brief moment she leaned on his shoulder, starry-eyed. She wished Thabang could have been there to witness her moment of glory.

From the restaurant, where they had a meal and enjoyed chatting, he drove on the old road to Cullinan. He had suggested that they go to a secluded spot. He adjusted the passenger's mirror by the touch of a button on the dash-board. 'My late uncle, Dr Jeff Mukhari, gave me this car.'

'Oh what a blessing!'

'Yes! He had no children. So when I passed my fifth-year medical studies, he just gave the car-keys.'

'That's wonderful Mashudu,' said Rabeka.

'If someone has blessed me, I must bless others. That's why after every church service I must drive my aunt to her house. This aunt is not my uncle's widow; she's my father's sister.'

She wondered why he was telling her about himself and his family. *Does this mean our relationship will go far?* she asked herself.

'It's a good thing, Mashudu.'

Mashudu indicated and turned into a dirt road.

She pointed. 'Is that the Mogale's mountain range?'

'Yes. But people refer to this part as the Baviaanspoort mountains because it passes next to the Baviaanspoort Prison.'

They stepped out of the car and walked to a Mookgopo tree. They sat down and maintained a 'holy' distance from each other. It didn't take long for Mashudu to sidle closer to her, and soon his hand explored her waist. The rural girl in her was becoming dominant and she removed his hand from her waist with a smile that told him she was contradicting herself. Both were hungry to touch and to exchange kisses, at this place far from prying eyes and gossip-mongers. But she pretended she wasn't in a hurry.

Mashudu grabbed her hand as if stealing and kissed the back of it. He searched the pocket of his jeans and took out a piece of paper. 'Listen!' He read a short poem.

She was greatly thrilled; she wanted to kiss him but she restrained herself. 'That's fantastic, Shudu! I didn't know that you're poet too!'

'You've turned me into a poet!'

'Can I tell you something?' he whispered, his lips touching her ear. 'I love you!'

She whispered too. 'Me too!'

The first kiss that he had planted on her cheek led to more kisses that became stronger as they increased.

She asked for the copy of the poem and she read it with increasing joy.

He touched her lips with his index-finger and thumb. 'Do you know why the lips are the most sensitive areas of the body?'

'Tell me doctor!'

He chuckled. 'They contain a rich supply of nerve endings.'

'Okay.'

'Kissing triggers the release of oxytocin, a hormone which makes you feel loved and cared for.'

'Oxy...what?'

'Oxytocin.'

'Please tell me more Shudu. You seem to be a moving library of *uhm...*'

'Kissiology!'

They laughed.

'Kissing,' he continued, 'is an excellent way of busting stress. At the same time it triggers the release of "happy" hormones known as endorphins in the brain.'

'Is that all?' she asked, following a pause.

He smiled. 'Kissing keeps you younger and slimmer.'

'How?'

'An energetic kissing session can exercise and help to tone facial muscles which helps you to look younger and happier!'

As they drove towards Mamelodi she enjoyed listening to him telling her more about kissing.

'I've really enjoyed my outing with you, Reeb's.'

'Me too Shudu!'

'But please let's keep a low profile at the church.'

'Why?'

'Some influential people at the church are keeping a watchful eye on the young people. The church leadership passed a resolution which banned hugging among young people.'

'Why?'

'They say it's an influence from the world and that it can tempt weak brothers and sisters to fall into sin.'

Rabeka kept quiet.

'I don't agree with the elders' decision,' said Mashudu, 'but we have to respect them.'

After kissing and exchanging sunny smiles, Rabeka stood at the gate of her home and waved at him as he honked and drove away.

6 'How was the date?' asked Thabang who had peered through the curtain in the kitchen as Rabeka and Mashudu kissed and bade each goodbye.

'We had a lot to discuss and to laugh about.'

'You sound really happy.'

Rabeka chuckled. 'Yah! He's a wonderful guy. I'm not surprised girls at the church hate me.'

Thabang winked. 'So you're now convinced the guy isn't just anything that puts on a pair of trousers saying: "I love you, I love you."'

'What did you talk about?'

'Many things including church politics. At one time I just felt like telling him: "Shut up and kiss me!"'

They guffawed.

'One thing that I liked,' Rabeka continued, 'is the fact that we are both artists. When I asked him how he was managing to combine music and medicine, he said his uncle was also pianist, and that he first played a piano and later preferred the organ as he grew older.'

'So you meant business when you told me you would charm him.'

'Yes! But he also charmed me!'

Rabeka stood up. 'Let me show you something!' She hurried to her bedroom from where she emerged a moment later, holding a piece of paper. 'He wrote me a poem! Let me read it to you: *When I think of you / I just wanna fly like a dove; / My heart's target's is you / my prize, my flower, my love!*

They both laughed and Thabang took the piece of paper from Rabeka her eyes overflowing with admiration and envy.

Thabang winked at Rabeka. 'You told me nice things about the guy, and how he read you a poem. Now tell me: did you kiss? You church people can be stiff.'

'Yes. Although he didn't rush things. He first kissed me on my cheek. I turned towards his lips; he gradually pulled his neck backward and he gave me a very sexy smile; he then embraced me and I could feel his hands behind my shoulder blades; he bent towards me - because he's taller than me - until our lips touched and pressed into each other; and soon our tongues touched. His tongue had a flavour of peach or apricot mouth freshener... oh he was so romantic and his lips were... I don't know how to explain it...but I restrained him!'

'Why did you stop him?'

'I remembered what my aunt once told me.'

'What did she say? The old lady who doesn't want you to enjoy yourself!'

Rabeka chuckled. 'She said the first French kiss should be delayed for at least three dates.'

'Why?'

'She said that will give both of us a chance to get to know each other before the hormones interfere with my judgment. But I know Shudu is my dream guy.'

Thabang smiled at Rabeka.

'And let me tell you: he told me about kissing.'

'He told you about kissing?'

'Yes, he said there are six types of kisses, but I remember only four.'

'What are they?'

'The forehead kiss, the Eskimo kiss, the Mouth Kiss, and the French kiss.'

'Where does he get all these..?'

'He said as part of their studies as doctors, they're also taught about relationships.'

'And what's an Eskimo kiss?'

'He said Eskimos... you know Eskimos?'

'They live at a very cold place? A place full of ice?'

'Yes! He says the Eskimos rub their noses just to show love rather than lust; he says this happens even between sexual partners.'

'You're going to learn a lot from this doctor-boyfriend of yours.'

'He's also going to learn from me.'

That last Sunday of October, a day after Mashudu's and Rabeka's date, she greeted him like someone in a hurry to go elsewhere. She was heeding aunt Mpule's advice. On her way to the gate where Patience was waiting for her, Rabeka met Matodzi.

Matodzi scrutinised Rabeka's hair. 'I can plait your hair better than that.'

'Is that so?'

'Yes! Ask people here at the church, they will tell you that I "have a hand" for plaiting.'

'Fantastic! I must come to your place, or you can come to my place...'

'I can come to your home on a Saturday.'

'I'll appreciate it Matodzi.'

Matodzi chuckled. 'Perhaps you can recommend me to plait more girls in your cast.'

'Why not?'

Patience was waiting for Rabeka in front of the church entrance. Rabeka could sense that Patience, who had seen her and Mashudu speaking, was not pleased with the growth of their relationship.

'I can see how your prayers have been answered,' said Patience.

'What d'you mean?' asked Rabeka.

'I can see that you've charmed the man for whom you had a crush. You may feel you've hit a jack-pot, but...' she shook her head, 'I still feel that...'

'Save your breath! I don't want to hear anything negative!'

'Please give a chance to explain. I'm just trying to be realistic.'

Rabeka pouted. 'Okay, tell me, Miss Realistic!'

'You know that in most charismatic churches, guys are scarce. And when there's one glamour-boy all eyes are on him, and they all want him!'

'So, all includes you! Tell me the truth Patience, do you want Shudu?'

'No I was just giving an example... I'm sorry my friend, I didn't want to pick a fight with you. I'm trying to warn you, to prepare you for a battle ahead. To be frank, if you want the best then there's going to be a fight.'

'I know, I know!' Rabeka balled her fists, 'And I'm going to put up a fight!'

'The devil is not going to fold his dirty arms and sing "Hallelujah!" with you.'

'I know, I know! No matter what, I'm going to enjoy my blessing! Do you hear me?'

7 During Monday and Tuesday of the new week Rabeka and Mashudu called each other during lunch and also in the evening. On Wednesday he called and told her that one of his many uncles had died and that from Friday to Sunday he would be 400 kilometers away in Venda. She was not impressed with the idea that on Sunday she would not meet him.

When she suggested that they should meet the next Saturday because Sunday was a short day, he told her that he would not be available as he would be driving one of his cousins to part with lobola.

Rabeka counted days; because she thrived on the adrenalin of work, Friday came and went down. At the church Rabeka and Patience reconciled; Patience had sent Rabeka an SMS of peace.

After the church service of that second Sunday in November, she walked straight to Mashudu car, where she waited for him. Minutes were like hours to her. For the whole week she kept replaying what she had regarded as an unforgettable kissing session during their first date. She was hungry for more of him. She desperately wanted to see him eye-ball-to eye-ball, to be with him; she wanted to show him off a little, so that the girls who had high hopes would know he was emotionally involved with her.

Five minutes later she decided to go and look for him. So she walked around the corner of the church building; she saw him standing at a room opposite the main church building where first-time visitors were often given refreshments. He was carrying the key-board in its bag, and he was surrounded by about ten young people who admired him, and treated him as their icon.

His back was facing her. Desperate to make him aware of her presence she sidled past the group so that she could see him. He took notice of her and gave her a smile. Gripped by a strong desire to kiss and be kissed, she felt her heart running recklessly in her rib-case.

'Hi, *sistah*, I'll check you,' he told her and then focussed his attention to the group. *Today he calls me sister?* thought Rabeka. *I was a sister until the day he proposed love to me...*

She walked to back his car. Half-way to the car, she saw Matodzi in the company of three friends, and she beckoned her over. Matodzi prided herself on the fact that an actress, whose face had appeared in the two newspapers, was her cousin's girl-friend.

'What part are you playing in the drama?' asked Matodzi, showing her friends that she was connected to a talented performer.

'I'm doing the role of Winnie Mandela.'

'Can you act just a line for us?' asked Matodzi's curious friend.

Rabeka tried to think. 'Which line can I do? Before I present it,' she looked at Matodzi.

'When are you coming to my place to plait my hair?'

'Next week Saturday.'

Rabeka paused a little. 'Okay, I'll do this one; it was after Mandela has been released from prison, and they are talking about a political settlement: "Don't be a coward, Nelson. We don't need any national unity. We've suffered too much under apartheid. Let the winner take all like in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Amaaandlaaaaa!"'

Matodzi and the friends applauded, and left immediately when they saw Mashudu approaching the spot where they were standing.

'Hi Reebbs!' He greeted her with a firm hand-shake. She leaned towards him ready to give him a bear-hug but she remembered that hugs were forbidden on holy ground.

'Hallo Shudu!'

'How was your week?'

'Great, but I missed you.'

'Me too!'

His smile faded out. 'Reebbs, I won't have much time to speak to you.'

'Why? Last Sunday you had gone to attend a funeral, and during the week we were busy; and on Saturday I couldn't see you because you had taken your cousin to lobola negotiations.'

'I'm sorry Reebbs! But I'm sure you could see how involved I was when I was speaking to the young people. After dropping my aunt I'll have to continue with part two of the same meeting. From here I'll have to rush to my flat for a quick lunch; I'll be attending a meeting with the worship team, in the afternoon, followed by a meeting with church choir leaders from other branches.'

He glanced at his wrist-watch. 'I must drive auntie to her house; she's arthritic.'

'I appreciate how you're helping your auntie. But what are you telling me?'

'I understand how you feel, but I told you we should keep a low profile at the church.'

'Did I agree to keep that low profile?' she said with mild irritation. 'Whatever it means!'

She realised that his attention was wandering; he was looking towards the car. She looked there and saw his aunt and another older lady who was usually in her company. From the way they were looking at her and Mashudu, she had a strange feeling that she was not a *cuppa-tea* for the two ladies.

'Shudu, a relationship is like a business; so you got to invest...'

'I'm sorry to cut you short. My aunt is getting impatient.'

He gave her a quick bear-hug and left. She raised her arms as if aiming to grab him and pull him back to her. 'I really don't understand you, Shudu! Can we meet some time next week?'

He stepped back towards her.

'I won't be around. I'm sorry I forgot to tell you...I'll be attending an inter-provincial health indaba in Bloemfontein!'

He hurried away.

She sighed helplessly. 'Okay!'

Rabeka saw Patience and a group of five girls looking at them and gesturing towards them. Rabeka felt a little embarrassed, wondering if Patience and the girls were gossiping about her.

Has this guy something to hide? Is he a two-timer? Anger was welling up in her. I cannot stand to be treated like this! She gritted her teeth. Yes, I'm going to ask him these questions and I want to look straight into his eyes. If he blushes then I'll know something is wrong!

* * *

She was depressed when she began a new week. She had regretted that she had already told Dudu about Mashudu. *Now what is she going to think when I tell her about how Shudu behaved on Sunday? And aunt Mpule? I'm not going to call her. I don't want her to think I'm becoming a cry-baby!*

That Tuesday, when she was alone in the bathroom she heard herself saying aloud: *Why do I have a feeling something bad is going to happen between Shudu and I?* But *No!* cautioned another voice inside her, *You mustn't invite anything bad by saying it will happen to you!*

She had heard that often when people were sad or depressed they ate a lot, but she decided to be a workaholic: on Wednesday she asked the drummer to teach her drumming; at lunch she would eat as she played. In addition to dedication to her work, aunt Mpule's words that her happiness should not depend on being next to Mashudu, helped her to recover from the hurt and pain; she became confident that their love would as a result come out stronger.

On Wednesday evening he called her, regretting how he had treated her on Sunday. She was quick to forgive him. She asked when he was returning and he told her it would be Saturday afternoon, adding that he would confirm. She had completely forgotten about the questions he had strongly felt he must answer. She was just relieved that he had apologised and that things had returned to normal. She felt light and energetic as she went to rehearsals for the rest of the week; and she found herself beginning sentences with "Shudu" and ending it with his name. For the first time, she told Dudu about how Mashudu had said kisses were useful for mental health.

8 On Saturday in the afternoon, Matodzi was standing behind a seated Rabeka, intricately plaiting her hair as she had promised. Matodzi had warned Rabeka that making her head look beautiful would cost her four hours, and she did not mind it.

'Sis Reeb's,' said Matodzi, 'how's progress with the drama?'

'There's a lot of progress. We now have a bass player. When this guy came - his name is Wala- when he came on Monday bra Sol told him he would not take him because the budget would not accommodate him. But on Tuesday Wala brought his guitar, but he hid it. We started rehearsing the song, *Nelson Mandela ke senatla* (Nelson Mandela is a hero); as we kept singing it, and the dancers were busy with choreography, he took out the guitar and started playing softly.

'Bra Sol said to him: "Why did you bring a guitar? I told you I don't want anyone to work for nothing! I don't want to be accused of exploitation of an artist!" And Wala said "No I *juss wanna* jam with the guys because this song has touched my feelings.' And he started playing along.'

Rabeka held and strummed on an imaginary guitar, '*Kooh-rooh-kooh-rooh! Booh-doooh-kooh-rooh! Kooh-doom!!*' It was so exciting that the dancers danced more expressively, than before. So we all shouted at the end of the song: "We want Wala!! We want Wala!!" We felt Wala had made the background very rich. Bra Sol had no choice but to take him. He said fortunately he had made some savings on some production costs.'

By the end of the second hour their chatting and Rabeka's progress report about the cast, had done much to nurture their friendship.

'Tell me something about Shudu, Todzi,' Rabeka said taking advantage of the warming friendship. 'Before me, who was Shudu dating? I'll ask him, but I just want to get it from you.'

Matodzi chuckled. 'Do you want to get me into trouble?'

'No, you won't get into any trouble, Todzi. Shudu and me are going to be open about our past. And I've no doubt he plans to tell me some time in future.'

'For many years Florah was Shudu's girl-friend.'

'And what happened?'

'They broke the relationship; I don't know the reasons.'

Matodzi continued to plait, using a needle, cotton and a small comb.

Rabeka looked into Matodzi's eyes as she cleaned the comb. 'Do I know Florah? Is she at this church?'

'She's not at the church, but she's a member. Her mother and our aunt are friends.'

'Okay, now I remember the lady. Was she with Shudu's aunt on Sunday?'

'Yes! Florah went to Burundi with the peace-keeping soldiers; she's a military nurse. I heard she's coming back next month.'

'Do you know if she's married? Has she a boy-friend?'

'She's not married, but I don't know if she has a boy-friend. Perhaps she has a boy-friend in the army.'

Oh, I can now piece things together... thought Rabeka When Shudu keeps telling me we should keep a low profile, he could still be having a space in his heart for his old flame.

'Please don't tell Shudu that I told you all this. He's going to blame me for having a big mouth.'

'No, I won't ask him. He'll tell me when he wants to.'

Rabeka was grateful that Matodzi had expertly plaited her hair as she had promised. She thanked Matodzi by giving her one of her dresses; she also gave her taxi fare and walked her to the taxi route. Just as the taxi drove away Rabeka received a call from Mashudu. He told her that he would be coming back on Sunday morning; he said he had decided to rest at the hotel for one more night.

'I won't go to church tomorrow,' said Mashudu. 'Listen, why don't you come to my flat? I'll SMS you the directions.'

'Fantastic!' said elated Rabeka.

When she entered his flat her nostrils caught a smell of a pizza. As they hugged and kissed she felt a surge of love which she was not sure, was caused by a short separation or tension between them; an unresolved conflict. She was convinced Mashudu felt the same.

Shudu, you keep telling me we should keep a low profile, thought Rabeka, I've just discovered you still have a space in your heart for your old flame. Gotcha!!

Mashudu gazed into Rabeka's eyes. 'Reebbs, is there anything bothering you?'

'Yes! Shudu I don't like the way things happened at the church, last Sunday,' she did not waste a moment, 'and I've three quick questions which I want you to answer truthfully: One - have you something to hide? Two - are you involved with someone at the church whom you don't want to see me? And three- why do you call me *sistah*? Are you trying to fool someone?'

Mashudu giggled. "'No!' is my answer to your three questions. And I used the word 'sistah' because I enjoyed pretending that I'm not involved with you. I'm trying to be

innocent, you see. Okay, let me admit that I'm guilty, and I apologise for..'

She smiled. 'Apology granted!'

He stood up and kissed her. 'Thank you Reebs.'

A moment of silence followed.

'You know Reebs, people talk too much at the church and they can exaggerate things. So keeping a low profile suits me because I'm a private person.'

'What do you mean by a private person?'

He paused and smiled. 'I'll give you an example. When a private person marries he prefers a small family function to a big *li-li-lili*-wedding attended by celebrities.'

She wanted to argue, feeling he had too easily convinced her - but she was delighted to hear him mentioning 'marriage.' She knew with this kind of a dude she'd have to fight hard to get to the stage of marriage.

'Well, I go for a big *li-li-lili*-wedding attended by celebs, and no apology!'

'Because you want to show the world that I'm now under new management?'

'I give you 100% dude!'

They laughed and kissed.

'Let's have a pizza and go to the cinema.'

'Okay.'

She asked to go to the bathroom, while he was preparing the pizza. She looked around for any sign of a female presence; she also checked carefully in the bathroom for any 'incriminating evidence' such as a bra or panties. But she found none.

As they had pizza she was relaxed, enjoying listening to his voice; he told her about his trip to Bloemfontein, the funeral at Venda, and his role as one of the go-betweens during his cousin's lobola negotiations. What delighted her most was when he told her that as from December he would be working as an additional and relieving doctor at a surgery in Mamelodi.

'Last Sunday,' said Mashudu, 'I heard you performing for Matodzi and her friends. You haven't yet rendered even a line for me.'

'Do you want it pronto?'

'Yes!'

Rabeka paused. 'I know what line to present to you. "The groom is my shepherd, and I shall not want anything. He leads me beside still waters free from *swart gevaar*! He restores my beauty in front of the United Nations and Yasser Arafat. Yea! Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of dead apartheid, I fear no evil.'"

Mashudu applauded.

'Well next time you'll play the key-board for me. Okay?'

'Yes ma'm! So how's the progress in the drama?'

'A lot has happened; there's progress. A white actress has at last joined our group. She'll now do the part I've just presented; it's a wedding scene. I did it because the director felt I could speak an Afrikaans-accented speech better than the girl who was given the part. I'll continue to do two parts: the part of Winnie Mandela and Mo-Afrika.'

'Is that Mo-Afrika Thabo Mbeki's "I'm an African?"'

'No. When the ANC and the National Party are to be married, the priest, Archbishop Tutu will say: "If anyone can show any lawful and just reason why the two should not be married, let him or her say it now or forever shut his or her big mouth!"'

And several people attending the wedding will be against the wedding for various reasons. For example Koekemoer from the rightwing will say: "I am against this marriage because the woman is white and the man is a kaffer!"

The groom will protest and the security guys will throw Koekemoer out of the wedding reception. And Mo-Afrika on the other hand will say to the groom: "You must be a poet who sees ugliness for beauty. Have you forgotten that black is beautiful?" then she'll continue and say: "Thank you God for creating me black! White is the colour for special occasions, black the quality colour for every day! I am content with the shape of my nose, and the colour of my skin! I thank God for creating me black!" and the Archbishop will say: "Thank you Mo-Afrika for your poetic rendition!"

'That's excellent Reebbs!'

'Thanks Shudu!'

'You really enjoy what you're doing!'

'Thanks.'

'It's a very interesting play *neh*?'

'Yes! And another white guy has joined. He'll do the part of Koekemoer - the Afrikaner right-wing guy. His name is Francois. The director wanted a bearded Afrikaner to do the part; the first white guy, Zeb, did not like to grow a beard.'

'So how many are you?'

'We are, let me see...nine black girls, nine black guys, two white guys and one white female...we are twenty one, excluding the band.'

'How many band members?'

'Perhaps five guys. We're starting tomorrow with the band. An interesting thing about the band is that we have a blind drummer; his name is Lefty. He's a nice guy I like him.'

'That's great! And what's the white girl's name? Is she a big name?'

No. Her name is Marlies van Niekerk. She has the right accent but the playwright didn't quite like her; he told the director: 'The girl has no acting talent, she's going to kill my script!' but bra Sol insisted: "Leave this to me and you'll see how I'm going to cook her."

She also told him that she intended to go and stay with a member of the cast in Ga-Rankuwa because the rehearsals were going to be hectic.

'We're going to work until late because the band must still master the songs and dances.'

'Okay, work is work; it must be done.'

'Thanks for being an understanding guy.'

9 During the week Rabeka and Mashudu exchanged SMS's and telephone calls. Both had a mutual feeling that they should keep a low profile at the church. Rabeka had felt that it wasn't a good idea to put Mashudu under pressure. She made up her mind that it would benefit her and their relationship to focus on her career, and enjoy love as it came. Their last meeting had convinced her that despite any query about Florah, Mashudu still loved her beyond any shadow of doubt.

During their last call for that weekend he was keen to know about their performances. She told him they would perform for some high schools on Friday second

December, and that on Saturday they would perform at a small theatre in Gezina, in the north-east part of the city.

'And our last show will be on Friday 9th December; we'll be performing for the workers' closing function. Which show would you like to attend? You must come and see me performing Shudu!'

'Of course! I'll attend the closing show.'

'Great!'

At last the cast will see Shudu! mused smiling Rabeka as she folded her cell-phone.

As Rabeka did not attend church in Mamelodi where she would meet Mashudu, she spent the last Sunday of November in Ga-Rankuwa with Dudu who was delighted to be her hostess. Dudu took Rabeka to her church.

After church, Dudu introduced Rabeka to a young man. 'He's Pontsho, my cousin's son.' Reeb introduced herself. Dudu and Rabeka walked with Pontsho to his car, a red well-fleshed Audi.

'Pontsho often takes me home after the church services,' said Dudu as they got into the car. 'He's an insurance executive.'

Rabeka nodded and smiled. Dudu told Pontsho that Rabeka was an actress in the same show, and he was impressed.

By the first week of December, it was known among the cast that Rabeka had a doctor-boyfriend, and that he would attend the closing show. Rabeka worked very hard on the production; she missed Mashudu, although they never failed to exchange two calls a day and SMSs. She comforted herself that though it was not possible for her to see him physically, she would soon see him and show him off.

When the cast performed at the theatre in Gezina, a journalist who had seen Rabeka in Junior's group at the Windybrow Arts Festival and during the Drug Day, interviewed her with the aim of producing a detailed profile on her.

That Friday, an hour before the cast went back-stage, Sol showed them a newspaper in which the story about Rabeka appeared. Rabeka gasped and exulted when she saw the article. They were thrilled to read about one of their fellow cast members. Highly delighted Sol congratulated Rabeka whom he said was an asset to the company and that she was promoting the production.

After the performance, which was well-received by the workers, the cast and some senior employees of the company and some shop stewards were given refreshments at the canteen.

Zakhele and two guys were standing together, eating platefuls of delicious food. One of the guys gestured towards Rabeka. 'Did you know that her boyfriend is a doctor?'

'Yes. Was he here during the performance?' asked another guy.

Zakhele smiled: 'I can grab her out of the doctor's hands!' *Hee! Uyadlala wena!* They guffawed.

Standing behind Zakhele and the guys, Busi overheard them, and she turned towards them. 'Wee, Zakhe, where's that doctor-boyfriend?'

'Why don't you ask her?' said one guy.

'Reebbs!' hollered Busi. 'Where's your doctor-boyfriend?'

Rabeka blushed. 'Unfortunately he couldn't make it!'

Busi jeered. 'She's just a big dreamer this girl!' said Busi.

Busi's remark evoked some giggles.

'Please let me explain, Busi,' appealed Rabeka, 'Shudu called just before the performance started and told me that because of a collision of a truck and taxi this morning; the doctor he's working for tried to avoid the overturning taxi; his car capsised and he was injured on the head. You can phone his surgery if you want to confirm.'

Sol announced that they would be re-opening on January 9th to continue with rehearsals for their performance in February in Polokwane. He thanked the cast for their hard work. He wished them a safe and happy Christmas; he added that he hoped to see them healthy and strong when they met again. Busi hit his wine glass with a fork, demanding attention.

'Bra Sol, can I say a word or two?'

Sol nodded with a smile. 'The ear has no lid, Busi.'

'Thanks bra Sol! Colleagues, I should like to thank bra Sol, our dedicated director, and Ringo our Stage Manager. I have a Christmas present, which they cannot share. I have this present,' she took a blue French beret, 'for Ringo to match his bluish chequered shirt!'

They applauded. Busi handed the gift to Ringo who kissed her.

'Thank you Busi! You live true to the meaning of your name: you're a blessing!' he admired the beret; he suddenly replaced his old black beret with the gift, and smiled. 'You really know how to get into your boss's good books, *eh!*'

They had a good laugh.

That second Saturday of December, Rabeka had a good rest. She had gone to Thabang's home. At twelve noon as she was ready to go and see Mashudu at the surgery. Thabang, accompanied her to the gate.

Thabang radiated a familiar smile. 'What are you going to say when you arrive at the surgery?'

Rabeka took up the challenge. 'Now you're the receptionist,' said Rabeka and addressed Thabang in the new role: 'I came to see Dr Mashudu Mudau.'

'Is it private or business?' asked Thabang.

Rabeka pouted. 'Private.'

The two roared with laughter.

'Very soon the receptionist will refer to you as 'the doctor's girl-friend.'

Thabang giggled.

'No!' protested Rabeka, 'I want the doctor to be known as the actresses' boyfriend. How's that?'

'Ya, you really think big, RB!'

When Rabeka arrived at the surgery, Mashudu was waiting for her in the car, ready for a lunch-hour date. As he drove towards the fried-chicken restaurant where she once met Gooshkah, she was trying to phrase mentally how she was going to ask about Florah. She would dare not ask him straightforwardly because she had promised Matodzi, her

informant, that she would not.

She thought the most diplomatic way would be to ask him: *Do you expect some relatives or friends to visit you during the festive season?* But she changed her mind, as they had lunch: *Perhaps the best thing is to pretend I don't know anything about Florah*, thought Rabeka. *Ignorance is bliss!*

Rabeka reminded him that within two days she would be going home in Limpopo.

'I'm going to miss you, Reeb!'

'Me too!'

'Are you going to have a good time with TM, aunt Mpule, and other folks?'

'Yes, I'll see bra T and the 'Realise Your Dream' project. Aunt Mpule and the Pastor and some members of the congregation are visiting Israel. But I want to spend more time with my parents. I want to give my father quality time because his situation is getting worse.'

'What is he suffering from?'

'Cancer.'

'I'll find out from colleagues in Oncology Section if your dad can't be transferred to Ga-Rankuwa hospital as part of a practicals treatment. I hope you don't mind.'

'Anything that can help will be appreciated.'

'And when are you re-opening in January?'

'Ninth January.'

He looked at her longingly. 'I'm going to miss you, Reeb. But work is going to keep me busy.'

'Do you expect many patients at the surgery?'

'Remember, I'm relieving for only two weeks. During the week of Christmas I'm going back to the casualty section at Ga-Rankuwa Hospital.'

In the evening as Rabeka had tea with her parents, Mashudu called, and she went out to speak to him. When he enquired about her father's health she told him he had not improved much.

'I'll speak to some knowledgeable colleagues at the Cancer Help Centre; they could suggest something about megavitamin therapy and anti-cancer diets.' As she told her parents about this conversation with Mashudu, whom she had referred to as 'a doctor I've met recently' she thought: *You'll meet him...your prospective son-in-law!*

She did not feel like going anywhere during the festive season. She wanted to spend quality time with her ailing father. She hated to think that this could have her last Christmas with him.

TM had also left for holidays. Some members of the 'Realise Your Dream' project visited her.

During two weeks leading to Christmas Rabeka and Mashudu spoke on their cell-phone three to four times a day, also exchanging SMSs. As a result she felt that although it was difficult for her to meet Mashudu she was far from becoming love-sick.

From Christmas eve until Christmas, Rabeka's father was bed-ridden; he complained of weakness and pains in his limbs. A day after Christmas Rabeka and her mother took her father to Polokwane Hospital, where a doctor said her father's type of cancer could be

'osteosarcoma' – a cancer of the bones.

On the first day of January, Rabeka attended a picnic organized by members of the Realise Your Dream project. She wished it was possible to Mashudu to attend so that she could show him off. She wanted other girls to see that it is always better to wait patiently for the right guy.

As expected, Rabeka had to 'say something' about her journey to the Promised Land.

'Yes, this time, I had to wrestle against the giants of the valley. And I'll never forget one of TM's warnings when he said: "Nobody said it's going to be easy! On your way to your Promised Land you are going to get tears in your red eyes, and dirt under your fingernails."

They applauded.

'But my last word is,' continued Rabeka, 'I'm prepared to face the giants of the valley. Backward is where I'm not going! Upward and forward is where I'm going!'

10 Seven days having eaten into the new year, Rabeka was alone at Thabang's home.

At 11h00 her cell-phone rang.

When she could see from the cell-phone screen that the caller was Patience she laughed.

'Hallo Pay, think of a rhinoceros and climb a tree!'

'What d'you mean?'

'Speak of the devil!'

They laughed heartily.

'When did you come back from Limpopo?'

'On the third.'

'I missed you, Reebz.'

'Me too!'

'You came on the third and you just kept to yourself?'

Rabeka chuckled. 'Listen, why don't come here? We can talk as we chow a watermelon.'

Thirty minutes later, Patience was at Rabeka's home. Half a watermelon was already in a tray, waiting to be eaten.

'Why did you delay to see or call me?'" asked Patience

'I kept postponing my friend. I spent some days at the library, reading about drama. I'm getting interested in directing. The director of the play, Bra Sol, is so motivating that he has developed a strong desire in me to be a director.'

'You're quite ambitious, 'eh?'

'Why not? So, for a few days I was feasting on books on directing.'

'When are your rehearsals starting?' asked Patience.

'Next week Monday.'

'Are you going to travel from Mamelodi to Ga-Rankuwa every day?'

'No. I'm going to stay at the home of a girl called Millie; she's one of the actresses; she told me yesterday that her parents –they live at another house– have agreed that I could come and stay with her.'

'When are you going to Ga-Rankuwa?'

'Next Monday.'

Holding a slice of watermelon with her left hand, Patience removed some seeds with a table knife, and plunged her teeth into the fruit; she smiled at Rabeka. 'Where's Doctor Shudu?'

Rabeka sucked and chewed a piece of watermelon. 'He passed here on Thursday night. He was straight from the surgery. He looked exhausted. He said life was hectic because two of the three doctors at the surgery are still on holidays.'

'And how's your love life? Great? No crisis?' asked Patience.

'If it's crisis-free, then it's no great love,' retorted Rabeka.

'But one has to avoid falling for a heart-breaker.'

'Are you suggesting that Mashudu is a...?'

'No, my friend. It was just a general statement.'

They kept quiet as they ate and enjoyed the watermelon.

'But rumours are flying around...' Patience indicated a bird flipping wings, by raising her fingers and lowering them in both hands 'Have you heard that...?'

'I'm not interested in baseless rumours! Keep it to yourself!'

'I'm sorry, I was just trying to help.'

'Gossip only hurts. What's important is that Shudu and I are in love.'

On that Monday as the cast began a second rehearsal week, during lunch Rabeka called Patience.

'Hi Pay, I just want to apologise, for the way I was rude to you last time.'

'It's okay, Reebs, I'm quick to forgive.'

'Thank you for being such a good friend.'

'Good friends fight sometimes, but soon reconcile.'

'You're right, Pay. I just want to make peace with you before I go to Polokwane with the cast'

'When is that?'

'On the 27th of January. So wazzzup?'

'Do you promise me that if I tell you, you won't blow up again?'

'No!'

'Are you sure? Cos last time you said: "Keep a baseless rumour it to yourself!"'

'I promise you; this time I won't...'

'Okay!'

Patience paused for a moment, while Rabeka braced herself for whatever tidings Patience would bring to her.

'Have you heard of a girl called Florah?' asked Patience.

'Yes; why?'

'She has just come back from Burundi with the soldiers. It's two weeks now. Do you know that she used to be Shudu's girl-friend?'

'Yes, I know!'

'And you are certain that the relationship with her is over?'

'Yes! Because I trust Shudu. We haven't yet talked about our ex-lovers. He'll tell me when the time comes.'

'You must wake up girl! Or else you'll be holding a bird's feathers while the bird is gone!'

'Why are you saying that?'

'There's something happening between Shudu and Flora. Last Sunday, after the service when you were in Ga-Rankuwa, I saw Florah and Shudu walking hand-in hand to his car.'

'Were they alone?'

'No; they were with his aunt and Florah's mother. His aunt and her mother are friends.'

'I heard about that. So what happened?'

'Only God knows what they said to each other in the car. But what I can say is: I later saw Mashudu and Florah the same Sunday in the afternoon having a good time at a MacDonald. And only God know what they were saying to each other. They didn't see me, but I saw them because I was in a car with my cousin buying some take-aways. I've never seen such a big smile from Florah. And I heard a rumour that the two are reconciling. I also heard that the pastor's mother is behind the reconciliation.'

Rabeka kept quiet.

'Hallo! Are you still there?' asked Patience.

'Yes! What you're telling me won't happen. I trust Shudu.'

'Oh-hoo! You'll trust him until the wedding bells with...'

'No! That's impossible!'

11 Rabeka sat on the lawn, closing her cell-phone. Dudu and Sbu were chatting at the opposite end of the lawn.

Rabeka called Mashudu and she was relieved when he answered the call; the worst she had imagined had not happened: to the call going to his voice-mail.

'Reebbs, I cannot speak to you now,' said Mashudu, 'I'm examining a critical patient.'

As she was about to walk to Dudu and Sbu, her cell-phone registered an incoming message. She thought it was Mashudu's message. But it was from a new cell number: *Thank you for looking after Shudu when I was in Burundi. There's a season for everything under the sun. Now's the time for you to take your hand off Shudu, for it's our season of reconciliation. What God has put together nobody can break apart. Florah.* Rabeka re-read the SMS with bated breath. Again she called Mashudu and the call was diverted to his voice-mail.

On the spur of the moment, Rabeka called Florah.

'Are you, Florah?'

'I've received your SMS. You must have sent it to a wrong number.'

'It's not a wrong number. It's the right number, for the right person.'

'Do I know you? Have we ever met?'

'I saw you last Sunday. I was standing with Matodzi and other girls. When you came towards us, I walked away, because I didn't want a Judas hand-shake.'

Rabeka kept quiet stunned.

'How did you get my number?' asked Rabeka.

'None of your *beeznis*! You just stay away from Shudu!'

'How dare you...?'

'You're a daring girl! Listen here! Shudu and I have reconciled; he took me out to

MacDonald, and as I'm speaking to you I have his engagement ring!'

Rabeka screamed and collapsed; Dudu and Sbu rushed to Rabeka who laid face-up, her arms and hands limb. Members of the cast hurried to the scene with Zakhele arriving first. Dudu told Sbu to fan air into Rabeka's nostrils while she loosened her skirt at the waist. When Zakhele tried to hold the back of Rabeka's knees, Dudu removed his hands. Zakhele bowed towards Rabeka's face. 'Let me give her a mouth-to-mouth...' Dudu smacked Zakhele with the back of her hand. 'Zakhele please stay away,' said Dudu her tone very icy. 'You know nothing about first aid!'

Busi stepped closer. 'Why can't you phone the doctor boyfriend?' she suggested, sarcasm all over her face.

'Busi, if you've no quick solution to offer, shut up!' said Dudu.

Sol and Ringo also came and stood by, their faces sombre.

A retired nurse who volunteered on Mondays for the elderly people, came.

'Prop up her legs,' she instructed Dudu, 'This will quickly restore the blood supply to the brain.'

The nurse checked Rabeka's heart-beat. She smiled. 'I'm coming.'

She walked towards a room serving as a mini-clinic from where she returned with a bottle in her hand.

She handed a small bottle to Dudu. 'Give her this Rescue Remedy; just a few drops on her tongue with water. Do not give it to her while she's still unconscious. It can cause choking.'

The nurse glanced at her wrist-watch. 'I must go for a home-visit.' She walked away.

'She'll be okay. And let her lie down for a few minutes after recovering.'

Sol squatted beside Dudu. 'What has happened?'

'She was speaking to someone on her cell-phone. She must have received some bad news from home. Her father is ill and is in hospital.'

An hour later Dudu took Rabeka to her house. Sol had organized a car.

12 On Tuesday concerned cast members mobbed around Rabeka. Two questions asked were *How you feel?* and *How is your father?* She answered that she was fine and that her father's condition was stable. The hectic first part of the day helped her recover further. An exacting dance sequence for the Nelson Mandela song lifted her spirits even higher. By midday she was the 'normal' upbeat, adrenalin-junkie Rabeka. During lunch she sent Mashudu, a *please call me urgently* SMS – against Dudu's advice; Dudu had advised that she must not phone him as that would create an impression that she was begging. *And don't bitch a man into another girl's hands*, were Dudu's words of wisdom.

'Shudu, what's this that I hear that you're seeing Florah?'

'Me, seeing Florah? Where do you...?'

'You tried to skin a stolen sheep in the donga...'

'Why don't you wait until I complete my sentence?'

Complete a sentence justifying your love for an old flame? thought Rabeka. *I'm not interested!*

'You tried to skin a stolen sheep in the donga,' continued Rabeka, 'but the

sparrows have seen you.'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'On Sunday afternoon where were you? Were you not entertaining Florah at MacDonald; you even bought her an engagement ring, and you think...'

'Reebs! Reebs! Listen...'

'Why did you hide such an important information from me? Now skeletons you had hidden in your wardrobe are chasing you, and unfortunately...'

'I didn't hide anything from you. Listen I had buried...'

'I never thought a Christian guy could behave like...'

'*Hoo-hoo-hoo!!* Reebs, you've been misinformed; all I can say is: people have fertile imaginations. We must meet; we cannot discuss such a sensitive matter on telephone. When can we meet?'

'Now!'

'I'll call you.'

'When?'

'Tomorrow.'

13 During the week she could not count as one of the best weeks, dedication to acting brought purpose and sanity to her life. Soon it was Friday.

On Saturday in the morning she woke up early; she had decided to go to his flat or the surgery where he usually relieved. She helped to clean the house, while Millie was having a bath. She prepared breakfast and they ate without chatting a lot. She responded in mono-syllables. Millie was in hurry; she was going out with her boyfriend to the cinema.

Rabeka had never made a habit of sharing her secrets with Millie because she felt Millie was too young and naïve to offer any sound advice. She also felt Millie lead a faster life than her. She was just grateful that Millie had offered a roof over her head while she was rehearsing the play.

An hour after Millie had left, Rabeka walked to the taxi route. *But what if I find him with Florah or some girl, and I'm embarrassed and humiliated*, a thought crossed her mind. So she changed her mind and returned to Millie's home. She felt she had taken the right decision.

When she arrived, she decided to call aunt Mpule.

'How's everything?'

'Everything is fine except my relationship with Mashudu.'

'What has gone wrong?'

'I can only say we have a problem that has not been solved. He promised to call me; I've waited for the whole week and he hasn't called. And whenever I called his phone was engaged or unanswered or it went to the voice-mail. My SMSes have never fished a single reply.'

'I'm sorry to hear about that. And I believe this is just a test to your relationship. Very often the devil will place obstacles because he knows you've great future.'

'I don't see any great future!'

'You know when it rains with storms, you never think a bright day will ever come.'

'Please pray for me!'

'I will, and I believe you'll go through the trial, Rabbeh.'
'I don't know.'

Rabeka spent the rest of the day perfecting her dialogue lines in the play script. She also read the current issue of her favourite magazine. Just before sun-set, Rabeka decided to jog as a way of relieving stress.

On Sunday she went to church with Dudu. After church Pontsho drove them to Dudu's house where he joined them for lunch.

After Pontsho had left Dudu laid her hand on Rabeka's shoulder. 'I observed that you're avoiding Pontsho's attempt to engage you in a discussion.'

'Maybe I just need time to heal.'

Dudu smiled. 'You are right. But when your boyfriend causes you heart-ache, that's the time when you must meet other guys as friends.'

'I've not problem with that,' justified Rabeka. 'Perhaps today I wasn't just in a talking mood.'

Don't try to be a match-maker, sis Dudu! Thought Rabeka.

14 At midday during that last Friday of January, a bus taking the cast to Polokwane arrived. The luggage and the stage equipment were heaped behind the bus, awaiting a trailer, which Sol and Ringo had gone to tow over.

The rehearsal week was shorter by a day because they would not rehearse on Friday.

'You must work very hard guys,' Sol ended his pep-talk on Monday before the cast went on with physical and vocal training, 'because your talent is your father and mother.'

Rabeka was full of zap, belying the fact that her love-life was not as bright as her face. Mashudu had not yet phoned as he had promised. She had decided to focus on her career, pleased that her talent would, unlike an unpredictable human being, never disappoint her. Dudu had helped a lot to cheer her up, and the pressure of work also helped in dispelling anxiety.

Some cast members chatted to their boy-friends and girl friends. There were six couples. Rabeka was chatting with Dudu, towards the back of the bus facing another couple, Bheki and Bertha.

'Bertha is bright and lively,' said Dudu, 'she's hit a jack-pot.'

Rabeka chuckled. 'Why do you say that?'

'She old enough to be Bheki's aunt,' explained Dudu.

'You and me are the only ones without boy-friends, excluding Marlies,' said Rabeka.

Marlies was chatting to Francois and Zeb, a few metres behind Dudu and Rabeka.

'People call us nuns,' said Dudu.

'I don't envy them,' said Rabeka. 'They're just using one another. The girls are giving the guys sex and the guys are giving them money.'

'But with Bheki it's different. Bertha is giving him money. He deserted his girl-friend, who's expecting his child.'

'How do you know that?'

'His girl-friend called me twice last week. Her name is Stella. She said: "Are you Bertha?" and I said "No, I'm Dudu." She said: "Tell Bertha to stay away from Bheki!"'

'How did she have your cell-numbers?'

'Bheki and I have been phoning each other. So Stella must have got them from his cell-phone.'

'Did you tell Bheki?'

'Yes! He just laughed it off and changed the subject.'

Rabeka turned to her right, attracted by the laughter from Busi, chatting to Tony.

'Another chicken murderer is Busi,' said Dudu. 'She's just a tart, this woman. You know last week as you were dancing with Tony, she said to me: "I want to eat him."'

'What did she mean?'

'She meant she wanted to seduce him.'

'Has she managed to...?' asked Rabeka.

'Yes! If she wants a guy she goes for him, and she never takes "No" for an answer until she gets him between her thighs. She might have seduced about three guys in the cast. And she told me desired to 'eat' Zeb. I also overheard her telling Margie that she wanted to 'eat' the musical director, the playwright and bra Sol. She said it would be exciting to have their creative sperms.'

'Did she really say that?'

'Yes. The musical director fell for her flirtatious joke. She boasted that she had a quickie with him during lunch in the store room.'

'What's a quickie?'

'It's love-making that takes a short time.'

Rabeka shook her head, disgusted. Dudu saw Stella sneaking behind the chatting cast members. Stella was tall and muscular, reminding Rabeka of Bathini.

Dudu grabbed Rabeka by her hand. 'That's Stella!' she whispered.

No-one bothered to warn Bheki and Bertha, who were sharing a cool drink, sucking from the same straw.

'I got you today!' Stella confronted Bertha. 'You've stolen my man!'

'Stella! Stella! Let's talk!' pleaded Bheki.

Stella balled her fingers, flexed her biceps and waved her fists. 'You shut up! I want to teach this harlot a lesson!'

Stella punched Bertha on her nose and kicked her on her stomach. Bheki tried to grab her but she shook him off and descended on Bertha, like a crazed *malaita* fist-fighter.

Dudu rushed and stood in front of Stella. 'I'm Dudu!'

Stella heaved a sigh and dropped her shoulders. 'You did well by intervening. There would be a corpse, and I would go and have this child' she pointed to her bulging tummy, 'in jail, because I'm in love with a cock!'

Stella walked away, and everybody gave a sigh of relief.

Suddenly she turned and scowled at Bertha. 'Sies you're a disgrace,' she hollered.

'Such an auntie undressing for a guy ten years younger than you?'

Sol and Ringo arrived towing a trailer, and the cast never hesitated in loading the luggage.

15 At last the bus drove to Polokwane, the men sharing seats with their girl-friends, friends next to their friends. Sol sat next to Lefty. Ringo, who should have rightly sat with Millie, sat in the back-seat with Busi, having a few drinks; he drank whiskey while Busi sipped wine. Rabeka sitting next to Dudu, glanced at Busi and Ringo. 'Ringo and Busi are good friends *nèh?*'

'Yes, you know how their friendship started? Ringo told me that Busi curried favour with him by giving him Margie. Ringo said his relationship with Margie lasted a week because he said she was a difficult and snobbish girl. So Ringo fell for Tsakani; when Boykie resumed his relationship with Tsakani, Ringo snatched Millie.'

'He's quite a lover-boy!'

'Yes! And Sol seems to find it difficult to discipline him; I don't know why.' Sitting several seats behind Dudu and Rabeka were Zakhele and Sbu.

'Sbu, I want to chat to Reeb; so do me a favour. Ask sis-Dudu to come and sit with you at this seat. Just tell her you want to discuss theatre with her.'

Sbu agreed and Zakhele went to sit with Rabeka, who had thrice rebuffed his romantic approaches. She felt the more she did not want to speak him, the more he desired to chat her up.

'I just thought it would be a good idea to separate you from sis-Dudu,' said Zakhele, 'she's Godmothering you too much; and you'll miss a lot from streetwise guys like myself.'

Rabeka gave him a *what-do-you-mean?*-kind of a look.

He stabbed her thigh with his fore-finger. 'You're a sweet lamb surrounded by all these hyenas here, and this tiger,' he touched his chest with his a forefinger, 'can protect you. *Hee! Uyadlala wena!*'

She laughed aloud. 'I don't need any protection, Zakhele.'

Encouraged by her laughter, he brushed her thigh, and she removed his hand. 'But what kind of a girl are you?'

'I'm my kind.'

He patted her shoulder, and she removed his hand. 'A very queer kind. You know there's rumour that you're a *trassie*.'

'What's a *trassie*?'

'A person who has both male and female sexual organs.'

'Where did you get that?'

'It's a rumour. And I can help squash the rumour.'

'I don't care about the rumour. But I'm curious to know how you'll squash it.'

'By sleeping,' he caressed her waist, 'with me.'

'I'm not the test-driven type.'

Zakhele guffawed. 'You must just be a normal girl. If you give it to me then I'll be able to see for myself and tell the rumour-mongers: "You shut up! She's just a normal girl! Nothing wrong!"'

He guffawed, and aimed his hand at her thigh; but she grabbed it. He bowed and kissed her hand.

'Try that with girls who admire you because you're an actor.'

He brushed her thigh again, and she removed his hand. 'Don't tell me of other girls. I'm

available to be of service to you.'

'I have a boy-friend.'

'No big-deal, Reebbs. The doctor boy-friend?'

'Who told you?'

'We all know. But why don't we see him? You're either lying or he doesn't care much about you.'

Or he doesn't care much about you, were painful and hard to bear words. She felt as if Zakhele could smell what was happening between her and Mashudu.

'Listen Zakhele, it's none of your business!' she hissed.

When they arrived at Meropa Conference Centre, a very economical accommodation which comprised two sections divided by a long corridor, they went to the common room where they had a brief meeting.

'Before Ringo allocates rooms to you,' said Sol, 'I want to speak about the code of conduct. Experience has taught me that whenever a group of people visit other places their behaviour often changes for worse. I don't know why. It happens also to soccer teams. I don't know if it's because of excitement or boredom. I want to announce a four-member Discom, a Disciplinary Committee; they are: Lefty, Dudu, Ringo and myself.' Sol gestured with his right hand. 'Over to you, Ringo.'

'Two people,' said Ringo, 'are going to share a room containing two double-bunk beds.'

Starting with men, he read a list and two people took their luggage and walked to their rooms.

Among the ladies the pairs were Dudu and Bertha, Millie and Rabeka, Busi and Margie, Sophie and Leah. The last pair, Marlies and Tsakani waited as Ringo was making a note on the sheet of paper he was holding.

Ringo handed a key to Marlies who hesitated to take it. 'I should have told you,' said Marlies, 'that I prefer to share a room with Zeb and Francois.'

'Why? Because they are white and you are white? And you feel unsafe in the company of black guys? Because you see in them a bunch of potential rapists?'

'No Ringo, please don't speak like that.' Marlies burst into tears and sobbed. 'My husband said I must be next to Zeb and Francois.'

'Tell your husband: he's the boss in house; not in our drama company.'

There was a moment of silence. Marlies wiped a tear.

Lefty paced closer to Marlies 'I'm a blind guy,' he told her, 'I don't see your tears, but...' he gave Marlies a hug. He turned towards Ringo. 'Ringo let Marlies be guarded by Zeb and Francois. Please!'

Ringo smiled at Marlies. 'You must thank advocate Lefty. You can go and share a room with Zeb and Francois.'

16 During the second night, Zakhele knocked at the door of Rabeka's room 'I know you're alone, I came to keep you company.'

'I don't need any company!' shouted Rabeka, 'Please go away.'

The next morning at breakfast, Dudu joined Rabeka at the table at the corner of the dining hall.

Dudu took butter and spread it on her toast. 'How did you sleep last night?'

'Not very well,' said Rabeka, who told her about Zakhele's visit, and that Millie had gone to Ringo's room.

'How did Zakhele know that you were alone?' asked Dudu, 'there's something fishy!'

'Yes! Just before Millie went to Ringo's room she said to me: "Reebs, I'm giving you an opportunity to live a normal life just like all of us girls."'

'Sies, she musn't try to corrupt you. You must come to my room, as from tonight,' said Dudu. 'Bertha must get out of my room; for two nights I could hear them making love; and when I complained she told me I should block my ears. So let them take your room.'

'Okay sis-Dudu.'

'There are just too many males rather than men,' said Dudu

'Why do you say that?'

'Real men are more responsible and they respect women. There's just too much mating at this place. Bra Sol was right that when people visit to other places their behaviour often changes for worse. Lefty told me that someone is making love in his room; they are taking advantage of his blindness.'

'No, this isn't good!'

'I don't blame Marlies for asking Zeb and Francois to be her body-guards. We may say she's a racist, but what can she do, when she feels like a chicken surrounded by hawks? Busi has asked Margie to move out of their room because she wants freedom to sleep with guys of her fancy. I heard that she asked Zeb to share a bed with her.'

'How do you know that?'

'Zeb told me. He said he went to her room and told her nicely that he was a gay guy. On the other hand Busi is spreading a rumour that Zeb has been bitten by a rabbit.'

'What does that mean?'

'That he's afraid of women.'

The next morning Zakhele told Rabeka. 'So you're sharing a room with Godmother? I'll get you!'

Throughout the week, as the cast went through the technical rehearsals and also went to busk at the shopping centre, Zakhele eyed Rabeka with increasing desire. The fact that he had touched her thigh and patted her shoulder, and the fact he felt he was very persuasive, gave him hope to hang onto. He remembered that over the years he had broken the resistance of many girls who were at first as uninterested as Rabeka. Experience had taught him that a girl's attitude could change from lack of interest to red-hot interest, as long as he was persistent.

On the first Sunday, in the evening Zakhele was standing at the door-way of the room he shared with Sbu, when he saw Rabeka accompanying Lefty to his room; whenever Lefty put away his blind man's stick, she became his stick. Rabeka had not seen Zakhele. After she had dropped Lefty in his room she walked past the room of Zakhele who emerged, grabbed her by her hand and pulled her into the room. She did not resist, as she thought she could persuade him. When he threw her on the bed and locked the room she realised she had blundered.

'Reebz, I'm available to be of service to you,' Zakhele patted his pubic area. 'Today you're going to prove to me that you're not a *trassie*! Okay!'

'Zakhele, stop it!' she yelled.

He unbuttoned a few buttons of his shirt at the chest, and rolled up the sleeves. 'Cool it Reebz!'

He pounced on her, and she resisted; he twisted her arm and pushed her towards the wall where he over-powered her. He embraced her tightly until he felt her breasts touching his chest; he tried to kiss her but she turned away her face; he managed to kiss her neck; she pushed him backwards and screamed.

Within seconds loud knocks pounded his door. 'Zakhele open the door!' shouted Lefty.

17 On Monday at 10h00 Zakhele appeared before the Discom. Rabeka was also present.

Lefty was Zakhele's 'prosecutor' while Sol was the 'magistrate'. After a lengthy grilling session and a separate discussion by Discom, he was admonished, much against Lefty's feelings that he should be expelled. Zakhele was instructed not to speak to Rabeka except on professional matters of acting or performance.

'And he must not be in the company of other guys,' suggested Lefty. 'Because when he's with other guys they influence him; he also smokes dagga with them, and dagga results in bad behaviour.'

Zakhele left Sol's room walking like a chicken drenched by rain. Busi and Margie met Zakhele in the corridor.

Busi put her hand on Zakhele's shoulder. 'What's wrong Zakhe?'

Zakhele told her what had happened.

'So Reebz took you to Discom? What kind of girl is she? Why can't she learn to handle life? Will she always be protected by bra Sol? I hate this girl! She thinks she's angel of light. Why can't she just behave normally like any of us?'

'She has Godmother who...'

At that moment Dudu appeared at the corner.

Dudu scowled at Busi. 'What have you said?'

'None of your business!' said Busi.

'I heard all what you said!'

'If you heard all what I've said why are you...?'

'Do you want Reebz to be as rotten as you are?'

'Who's rotten?'

'You know yourself Busi. Wherever we go you must sleep with a guy. Just a day after we had arrived here you and Margie spent a night with some Grigambas.'

'How do you know?'

'You boasted about it! Some girls heard you when you said "I want to taste a Nigerian sausage."

'They've misheard me! I was referring to a Nigerian dish! I was speaking about food and they thought...'

'You know you are lying before God.'

'Listen Dudu! You are as cold as frozen turkey,' Busi said contorting her brow. 'Don't ever think you can change me. I'm a hot-blooded, and alive! You are as cold as a freezer!'

'Busi, your body is God's temple. And you must stop giving what is holy to the pigs...'

'Hei wena! Stop preaching to me! I am a pastor's daughter! I grew up listening to speeches about good morals and scare talks about hell's fire.'

Busi strutted away, Margie trying to overtake her.

Margie stopped and turned towards Dudu. 'Dudu you can really be harsh.'

'Surgery can be harsh,' responded Dudu, 'but it saves lives.'

At that moment Rabeka came to the scene, and Dudu walked with her.

'I've talked many times, pleading with Busi to behave. When I heard that she had seduced toy-boy Tony, I said to her: "Busi you must respect yourself! Shame on you, such a big woman undressing for a boy old enough to be you son!" and you know what she said?'

'What did she say?'

'She said what men do to women she can do it to them. She also said there are sugar-daddies, what's wrong her being a sugar-auntie '

'She's proud to be a sugar-mummy?'

'Yes!'

18 During the opening night Rabeka ascended to the stage in Polokwane's Civic Centre, recalling TM's words of encouragement: *Your mother is going to be proud of you one day*. Her mother was seated in the first row of VIPs, sandwiched between TM and aunt Mpule. Rabeka felt she was presenting her lines, executing actions and dancing with elan for her mother. It was an opportunity to charm and to persuade her mother by rendering a stunning performance. Although it was a product of an excellent team-work, Rabeka received lots of cheers, not only because she was a local talent but because she had delivered her task effortlessly.

While her mother seemed stunned most of the time, TM, aunt Mpule and the members of the 'Realise Your Dream' project cheered the loudest, and that resulted in arts journalists' cameras concentrating on her.

At the end of the show, as the cast lined up, joined hands, bowed to the audience and received a standing ovation, her mother was so excited that she stood up and shouted: 'That's my girl!'

The audience applauded her mother.

After the show, the cast joined a dinner attended by dignitaries such as the mayor and the MEC for Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture. Rabeka was the centre of attraction, interviewed by the local media and posing for pictures with a lot of prominent people. She also smiled at the cameras with Sol, and with the cast; her mother, aunt Mpule and

TM also posed with her as a group and individually.

When all the excitement around Rabeka had abated, Rabeka found a moment to be with her mother. She told Rabeka that father was still at the hospital and that his condition had not improved much. Rabeka was saddened to tears.

When Rabeka gave her mother money, Mma-Rabeka received the money with two hands and bowed a little, a smile flooding her face. 'Thank you, whose totem is the buffalo.' She hugged and kissed Rabeka. 'How long are you going to earn money as an actress in this drama?'

'We've two more months to go.'

'And the job will be finished?'

'Yes, *mma*. That's how things go in the acting business. But what I'm doing here will open other doors in future. I hope to get jobs in radio and TV, or even in films.'

'I had no idea you were such a good actress,' said her mother.

Rabeka chuckled. A few metres away, Rabeka was delighted to see TM and Sol engaged in discussion; she wondered what they were talking about.

'I appreciate that your talent is giving you money,' said her mother. 'But I hope you'll be able to get a proper job; the job that will give you a house and medical aid.'

Rabeka smiled at her mother. She knew she would never win the argument.

'And how's your boss?' inquired Rabeka's mother. 'What's his name?'

'He's Sol Moraba.'

Her mother's eye shone with mischief. 'Is he not a naughty type, who'll later try to seduce you?'

Rabeka laughed aloud. 'No, *mma*!'

'Is he married?'

'No. But he's married to his work. I heard that after having a *vat-en-sit* relationship with a teacher for eight years he decided to stay alone and to concentrate on his work as a playwright and a director. He also studied in America.'

Rabeka also spent some time chatting to TM, who was delighted to see her on stage for the first time as a professional actress. Members of the 'Realise Your Dream' project also had a slice of her time; as they mobbed her, asking umpteen questions, aunt Mpule sidled closer and grabbed her by her hand.

Rabeka eagerly wanted a heart-to-heart talk with aunt Mpule who lead her to her car.

'So what's new, Rabbeh?' asked aunt Mpule.

Rabeka knew she was referring to her relationship with Mashudu.

'Nothing has changed, auntie. I called him two weeks ago on a Sunday. He told me there were other things happening that I wasn't aware of, and that I didn't know what he was going through. When I asked what was he going through, he said: "Reebs, please give me time to evaluate the relationship." He said everything happened so fast and that he wanted to make sure he had taken the right decision. He also told me that perhaps the temporary separation would give me time to think over the relationship.'

Aunt Mpule nodded, sympathy smouldering in her eyes; she also held Rabeka's hand and massaged it.

'I told him,' continued Rabeka 'that I had already decided I must invest my life in the relationship, and that it's him who is dragging his legs. He said I shouldn't put him

under pressure and when I asked him more questions he cut me off...I never thought a Christian guy could behave the way...'

Rabeka burst into tears and aunt Mpule comforted her. 'It will come right, Rabbeh.'

'I don't know auntie! I want a solution! Oh it's hurting.'

'I know!'

'Do you know how embarrassed I'm going to feel when the girls ask me:

"Where's your doctor boyfriend?"'

'I know! But all I can say is: God knows why that is happening, and he's in charge.'

19 The next day, on a Saturday after breakfast Sbu told Rabeka and Dudu that Zakhele was on a hunger strike and that when he left the room which they shared, he was sobbing.

'He must be sorry for his sins,' said Dudu.

'He has been miserable for six days,' said Sbu. 'Since he appeared before Discom.'

Sbu left.

Dewy-eyed Rabeka turned towards Dudu. 'I really think Zakhele regrets what he has done.'

'If that's true he must come and tell us. Or tell you.'

'It might be difficult for him.'

'So what do you suggest?'

'I don't know.'

'Only God knows how far he has changed.'

'Sometimes when people have been sent to jail, if their behaviour changes for the better they are released.'

'Yes. That's called parole.'

'Let's go and speak to bra Sol.'

Sol asked that the members of Discom attend the meeting requested by Dudu and Rabeka, at about 12h00.

'Why pity the snake?' said Sol after Dudu and Busi had presented their feelings about Zakhele's "banning orders". 'Let him suffer for what he did!'

'I agree with bra Sol,' said Ringo. 'After all, the bible says you reap what you sow!'

'Bra Sol,' pleaded Rabeka. 'Zakhele is so miserable that he has lost weight,'

'He lost weight because he's smoking dagga!' said Sol.

Lefty, who had been listening, indicated that he wanted to speak. 'Bra Sol, I agree with Reeb's and Dudu. Zakhele has been punished enough. We don't want to see him committing suicide.'

Sol kept quiet for some time. 'So, what do you think we must do to solve the problem?'

A long moment of silence followed.

'Perhaps we can do something...' suggested Dudu, 'I don't know how to explain it. Something in which Zakhele does something for or with Rabeka... something that will teach him to respect women.'

'Do you think you can teach that dagga-smoker anything?' asked Ringo.

'I don't agree with you, Ringo,' said Rabeka. 'When people have been sent to jail and they change they often get parole and have their prison terms reduced.'

'I find Dudu's idea interesting,' said Lefty, 'especially because we are artists. It can be a creative way of changing a person such as Zakhele.'

'Are you saying,' said Sol, his gaze fixed on Dudu, 'we should commute Zakhele's "sentence" to something less punitive, but something that you think can change him?'

'Yes bra Sol. To give an example, a convicted child abuser can be asked to work with children.'

'Bra Sol,' said Ringo, 'let them come with a concrete idea of how they think Zakhele's 'sentence' can be commuted to something else.'

'Why can't we ask him to take Reeb's out?' suggested Lefty.

'Take Reeb's out?' asked Ringo, his tone incredulous.

'Yes!' agreed Dudu. 'We ask him to buy her lunch, speak to her and learn to appreciate her as a friend and not a sex object.'

'But we must ask him to apologise to Reeb's for what he did,' said Lefty.

'Are you okay with the idea?' Sol asked Rabeka.

'Yes, bra Sol.'

Sol chuckled, looking at Ringo. 'Let's give it a trial. What do you think?'

'It's okay, bra Sol,' said Ringo.

They agreed that Zakhele should be invited to another short meeting in the afternoon. Sol asked Dudu to ask Zakhele to attend the meeting without disclosing the details. Zakhele's first reaction was: *What have I done now?*

When he was told how his "sentence" had been commuted to an outing with Rabeka, he smiled, chuckled and shook his head.

'When can I do that?' asked Zakhele a smile exposing his teeth.

'Tomorrow on Sunday,' said Sol.

When Zakhele walked out of Sol's room, he was all smiles.

20 During the performance that evening, Zakhele excelled on the stage, and Sol was convinced that they had taken the right decision during Discom meeting. After the show, Zakhele led Rabeka and Dudu, to a table in the theatre bar, where he bought juices and they sipped as they chatted.

Busi and Ringo sat at a table at the opposite end of the bar. She sipped wine while Ringo hit some whiskey tots.

Busi saw smiling Zakhele sitting with Rabeka and Dudu.

Busi smacked the back of Ringo's hand, and pointed. 'What's happening there?'

'It's a peace-making meeting,' Ringo told Busi. 'We recommended it during the Discom meeting.'

Busi laughed and smacked her palms loudly. '*Ah-ah-ah!* I've never seen such a smile from Zakhele! It's such a dramatic change! If Dudu wasn't a religious woman I would have suspected that she had bewitched him.'

A few moments later Zakhele, Dudu and Rabeka left the table. Zakhele was between them, holding their hands as they walked towards the door.

Busi winked at Ringo and made a funny face. 'Mh! Zakhele is sandwiched between Godmother and the angel.'

'He'll take her out for lunch tomorrow,' said Ringo.

'A-a-a-h-men!' Busi smacked her palms and guffawed.

On Sunday at about 12h00, Zakhele and Rabeka ambled towards the gate. Seeing Zakhele and Rabeka together in a relaxed mood, Tsakani smiled at Rabeka. 'What's going on?'

'He's taking me out.'

'Taking you out?'

'Yes!'

'Since when are you friends?'

'Yesterday'

'Do you trust him?'

'Yes!'

'You are a crazy girl, Reebbs. If a snake comes to you and say: "I'm harmless" will you trust it?'

'He's not a snake.'

Zakhele chuckled and held Rabeka's hand.

Keeping a safe distance, as if she were a private detective, Dudu saw Zakhele and Rabeka taking a table at Nandos; she walked past and entered a fast food restaurant nearby.

Zakhele and Rabeka had their meal and added a dessert.

'*Sistah R*,' said Zakhele softly, 'I want to apologise for all what I did to you. And for all what I said to you. Please forgive me.'

Rabeka paused, her eyes a little tearful. She sighed. 'Okay Zakhe. In fact I've already forgiven you.'

Zakhele extended an open palm, giving her a hand-shake of peace. 'Thank you *sistah*!'

They clasped their palms for a moment, and smiled at each other.

The waitress interrupted their act of peace. 'Would you like to have something else?'

'Yes' said Zakhele, whose gaze shifted to Rabeka. 'What would you like to have?'

'Rooibos with honey.'

Zakhele asked for the same.

'I was silly to say you are *trassie*,' said Zakhele.

'I'm not a *trassie*. I'm still a virgin.'

Zakhele gave her a look filled with awe. 'Really?'

'Yes!'

'I cannot believe it!'

'Believe it!'

'How did it happen?'

Rabeka giggled, but soon wore a serious look. 'If you are able to do something with little effort or without effort what do we call that?'

Zakhele paused while thinking. 'I don't know.'

'It's a gift or talent.'

Again Zakhele gave her another penetrative look. 'So you are that kind of a girl... can I guess?'

'Yes!'

'You belong to those churches that say a girl must wait for the wedding day before she can have sex.'

Rabeka chuckled. 'Yes. But I don't want to hide behind the name of a particular church. Because I've strong beliefs and convictions and I've personal experience that this lifestyle is the right one. I was raised by God-fearing parents, I was a Christian at an early age.'

She paused, maintaining eye-contact with Zakhele.

'My grand-mother told me that,' she continued, 'before the white man came with Christianity, the young people, boys and girls, were virgins.'

'I think that's true. That must have happened in many cultures.'

'Yes.'

'I don't know how we lost it.'

'Civilisation.'

Zakhele nodded and smiled.

'But we are getting it back,' said Rabeka.

She took out a newspaper clip out of her hand-bag and spread it in front of Zakhele, who saw the picture of a famous singer, Kiki Kumalo, wearing tight pants and a t-shirt inscribed: *Proud 2 B Virgin-Active*.

Zakhele read the story about Kiki.

Zakhele smiled. 'So you have a celeb of a role model.'

'Yes. If people are proud to be gays and rastas, why can't we proud to be virgins?'

'You must invite me to your pride-march!'

They laughed aloud.

Rabeka grabbed Zakhele's back of hand, and smiled. 'Today you've demonstrated that you can change from being a mere male to a man.'

'What's the difference?'

'Real men are prepared to invest their time in cultivating a relationship with a woman; if they want a woman and she says "No!" they respect her and may even become friends with her. Males just love to mate.'

Zakhele guffawed.

'I'm serious!' continued Rabeka, 'Men appreciate what's between a woman's ears, while males want what's between a woman's thighs: *Bang-bang-bang!* And like wild animals they look for the next target!'

Again Zakhele guffawed. 'I never thought you're capable of saying such things!'

Rabeka cackled, and Zakhele gave her a strong bear-hug and kissed her cheeks. They returned from the outing walking hand-in-hand. Dudu trailed behind them.

21 During the new week word that Rabeka was a virgin spread among the cast. One morning she was doing a dance sequence in which Tony frog-jumped her, somersaulted and landed down on his back and lifted her up, balancing her on her waist. She slipped and landed on her buttocks.

'Tony please be gentle with Reebbs!' said Busi, 'Don't you know she's still a virgin?'

Busi's sarcasm evoked laughter from some cast members.

Towards the end of the week, during breakfast Rabeka was seated with Dudu, eating bacon and eggs.

Margie and Busi, carrying trays, sat at the next table.

Before sitting down, Margie inspected Rabeka's plate and smiled. 'Do virgins eat a lot of eggs?'

Busi and Margie guffawed. Dudu and Rabeka made eye-contact, and continued eating.

The show ended on Saturday and the cast traveled back to Pretoria on Sunday. As the bus traveled, Busi observed that a lot of cold air was coming into the bus.

'Please close the window,' said Busi, 'a virgin will catch flu.'

Again Dudu and Rabeka exchanged glances but said nothing.

'Do you know why Reebbs once collapsed during rehearsals before we went to Polokwane?' asked Busi.

'I heard it was because of her father's illness.'

'No. The truth is,' said Busi, 'she fainted because she's living unnaturally as a virgin. She ran short of blood in her head.'

Laughter roared again.

'Do you know why I don't like Reebbs?' Busi asked Millie quietly, 'When she was still working at the State Theatre, she once found me and my boy-friend having a quickie during lunch, and she told newspapers about that.'

'How can she do such a thing?' said Millie.

'No only that; she caused my boy-friend to lose his job as a Marketing Director. She lied that he wanted to seduce her. She also told the newspapers.'

'That's not good,' sympathised Millie.

'Is she still staying at your place?' asked Busi after a pause.

'Yes!'

'Don't you find it difficult to live with this kind of a person? Is she not preaching to you?'

'No. But she often invites me to join her when she goes to her church with Dudu.'

'If I were you I would discipline her. Why don't you invite your boyfriend to come to your home with his friend? At night your boyfriend's friend could sneak into her bed, and the rest will be history... she'll lose virginity and be like all of us.'

'Do you think it will work? In Polokwane I tried to organize Zakhele, but it never worked.'

'This time it will work,' insisted Busi, 'because her Godmother won't be around. Try it Millie.'

Millie took out her cell-phone and called her boyfriend, pronto.

Busi smiled and gave Millie a congratulatory wink.

When they arrived at Millie's house, Rabeka had a bath and later a cup of tea. When she was about to go to her bedroom, Millie told her to mop the kitchen and to 'hoover' the carpets. Rabeka felt Millie's tone was an instruction.

'I'll do everything tomorrow,' said Rabeka. 'I'm tired and I just want to have a good rest.'

'You must just 'yes-mam me' cos I'm in charge here! *Hau*, do virgins get tired?' The two had such a heated argument that Rabeka started packing her belongings. She called Dudu who came to fetch her.

22 That third Monday of February Rabeka had a good rest at Dudu's house.

On Tuesday at the rehearsal place, Millie and Rabeka, being good actresses, talked to one another as if nothing wrong had happened. While Busi was avoiding Rabeka, Zakhele was delighted to see her, addressing as 'Sistah R'.

Sol spoke to the cast, motivating them to work harder for the performances in Mafikeng. He asked them to work in twos and threes, as he was busy with a report to be sent to sponsors.

Rabeka went to Sol and asked to try her hand at directing. She motivated that she was inspired by him and that she had read a few books about directing.

Sol smiled at her. 'Directing is deceptively simple; everybody thinks he can do it. I'm not trying to undermine you.'

'It's okay, bra Sol.'

'I've worked with you and I convinced you're going to make a great performer. When you want to do more work I cannot say to you: "Be satisfied with where you are." If you want to grow, I must give you room for growth; I must encourage you.'

'I'll appreciate it, bra Sol.'

'It's only insecure people who feel threatened when others want to go grow. You'll remember that the first day when you attended the auditions you came early and I remarked that I wanted to work with artists who are job-hungry, because they are very motivated. So I'll see what I can do to empower you particularly because you are a young black woman.'

'Oh! I'll appreciate it, bra Sol.'

'Universities and Technikons are producing drama graduates, and lots of shows are produced but there are few women directors.'

Sol smiled at Rabeka. 'Which part of the drama are you interested in?'

'The divorce scene between the Nationalist Party and the ANC.'

'Okay. I'll prepare Aca-Joe and Marlies that you are going to direct them tomorrow.'

'Thanks bra Sol.'

Sol opened his ruck sack. 'You can have a look at this book.'

'Thank you very much, bra Sol.' Rabeka kissed the book and scrutinised the title. 'Fundamentals of Play Directing? I think I saw the title at the Es'kia Mphahlele Library.'

'If you read a lot, you'll grow much better.'

Rabeka chuckled. 'Thanks bra Sol.'

That Wednesday morning hawk-eyed Rabeka sat on a director's chair as Aca-Joe and Marlies were about to start rehearsing the divorce scene, in an empty space parking lot. It was used by some policemen who worked at the police headquarters, a block away. Rabeka raised her hand. 'One, two start!!' She snapped her fingers.

Aca-Joe waved a fore-finger and hurried towards Marlies, shouting. 'Wilhemina, get out of my house! I don't want you anymore!'

'I'm going nowhere! I belong there!' protested Marlies.

'I say, get out!' charged Aca-Joe who then began to man-handle and push Marlies.

'Stop!' hollered Rabeka who stood up and showed Marlies that she must stretch her neck towards him instead of bending it away from him.

'I also want to see anger and defiance, Marlies,' commanded Rabeka.

Rabeka raised her hand. 'One, two start!!' She snapped her fingers.

As Aca-Joe and Marlies were rehearsing, Rabeka's attention was attracted by a white policeman stepping closer to the two performers, gaze full of shock.

'Hey, what's happening here? Why are you...?' the policeman demanded an answer from Aca-Joe.

'No Sir, we are busy rehearsing...'

'Why are you pushing this woman...?' a fuming police officer interrupted Aca-Joe.

Rabeka raised her hands. 'Officer, we are busy rehear(sing)...'

'I say why are you pushing this WHITE woman like that? Answer me!' said the policeman.

At that juncture one of the cast members came, cupped and suppressed laughter threatening to erupt and exchanged amused glances.

'What's your name?' The officer addressed Marlies

'Marlies van Niekerk,' she responded.

'White woman, what are you doing with this black man?'

Amused Marlies hesitated to respond.

One of the actors pointed his index finger to the officer. 'It's none of your business!'

'What did you say?' the police officer confronted him. 'Lady,' police officer spoke to Marlies 'Why don't you come and lay a charge for...'

'A charge of what?' queried Marlies who was getting irritated.

'Marlies, maybe the officer will be delighted to hear you cry: 'Rape! Rape!' 'one of the actors interjected.

'Mr Police Officer,' said Rabeka, 'I'm the director, and these two are just doing drama!'

'I don't care! This is not how to treat a woman! Especially if she's white and the man is black!' barked the policeman who hurried towards his car.

As he drove out of the yard, the cast weren't sure if the officer understood what 'drama' meant. All of them including Aca-Joe and Marlies, laughed with relief.

The cast dispersed and Rabeka continued directing for the next thirty minutes, making notes.

Her cell-phone rang. The person calling was aunt Mpule, wanting to speak to Dudu, which Rabeka found a little strange. Rabeka saw Dudu's face becoming sombre and heard her voice.

Dudu embraced Rabeka. 'I'm sorry to tell you that your dad passed away this morning.'

Rabeka cried on Dudu's shoulder; Dudu kept rubbing her shoulders. The cast members came and stood around Rabeka and Dudu. They knew that something really bad must have happened. Some guessed right that Rabeka's father must have passed on. Rabeka's cell-phone rang again and she handed it to Dudu, who had become her family's spokesperson.

Dudu told the cast that the funeral would be within three days on Saturday because the deceased had expressed a wish that his body should not be kept for a long time in a 'fridge.'

23 On Thursday morning, Rabeka and Dudu were passengers in Pontsho's car, taking them to Polokwane.

By Friday, most relatives from far and near had arrived at Rabeka's homestead, bustling about for a typical big African funeral. TM and the members of the 'Realise Your Dream' project were there lending a helping hand, comforting their friend.

On Saturday the cast arrived at 05h00. The funeral service started at 07h00 and by 11h00 it was over. The people attending the funeral were queuing in front of the lapa, washing their hands in bathing basins, as it was the custom among the villagers. From there they followed a snaking queue towards the tables where food was served. The members of the cast led by Sol were escorted to a white tent where they joined the priests and VIPs. TM and Sol, sandwiched Rabeka who sat next to Dudu. Pontsho sat next to Dudu.

Members of 'Realise Your Dream' project socialised with the cast; the village boys and girls who aspired to be artists looked on, listening avidly and lapping up words of wisdom from the 'artists of the city.'

Zeb walked to Dudu, who was chatting to a group of about five girls. Dudu was holding Lefty's hand, as his guide. 'Dudu, tell me why do you darkies wash hands after the funerals?'

Dudu smiled Zeb, shaking her head. 'I don't know, Zeb.'

'You don't know?' asked incredulous Zeb.

'Yes, I never asked my elders. I found them doing the practice, and I follow it because I believe it's our culture.'

Lefty touched Dudu with his free hand. 'Dudu why don't you ask the old folks of the village? These people are walking encyclopedias.'

'You're right, Lefty,' agreed Dudu.

Dudu grabbed Zeb by his hand and walked over to an old couple who were still using their index fingers and thumbs as tooth-picks.

'This white guy,' said Dudu, after she had exchanged greetings with them, 'wants to know why black people wash their hands after funerals.'

The old couple grinned towards Dudu. The grins matured into smiles when their eyes landed on Zeb.

The old man's gaze shifted to the old woman. 'Tell them Ngwan'a Ngoetjana. Don't the elders say: 'Teach the children the divination bones; don't depart with them to the gods?' The old woman heaved a sigh, as the rest of the cast and the youth of the village stood around with thirsty ears.

'This practice started many many years ago,' said the old lady. 'It was not applicable to every funeral. It was used only when the relatives suspected that the dead person was bewitched. The family would as a result ask their medicine-man to mix some ground herbs in water.

'When the people came back from the grave-yard, they were requested to walk in single file towards huge earthenware-pots containing water with herbs. Washing their hands was a public way of saying: "I haven't bewitched the dead person, and I have nothing to fear; that's why I'm washing my hands. If anyone avoided washing his or her hands the observant people knew that the person was guilty of witch-craft. It was believed that the guilty person would be exposed by the herbs.'

Dudu spent a moment interpreting for Zeb, Francois and Marlies.

'How would the witch be exposed?' asked Aca-Joe.

'The person suspected would lose his mind,' said the old man. 'He would for example start saying that he wasn't alone and that he was some people which he would name.'

The members of the cast looked at one another.

'African Mafia!' exclaimed Sol.

The young people burst into loud peals of laughter.

Before the cast left, Rabeka asked Sol to speak to two of her relatives and explain why she needed to leave.

'She must be with us very soon,' said Sol, 'because it's what is called showbiz. We don't have pension fund and medical aid, so if you got a job you got to make the most out of it. We are preparing to go to Mafikeng, so I'll appreciate it if she could be released so that by next Tuesday she can attend the rehearsals.'

Aunt Mpule called Rabeka aside and gestured towards Pontsho. 'Have you reconciled with your man?'

'No, this guy is Pontsho. He's just a friend. He's sis-Dudu's nephew'

Rabeka and aunt Mpule did not want to speak about Mashudu.

'I'll pray for you,' said aunt Mpule.

'Thank you auntie.'

During the last weekend before the group went to Mafikeng, Rabeka wanted to plait her hair. She had realised that a chic hair-style was a worthwhile investment for life on stage and off-stage. She preferred her plaiting to be done by girls who did the business from their homes rather than at established hair-salons. She did not know of any girl in Ga-Rankuwa who could plait her hair. So she consulted Dudu.

'If I was still staying in Mamelodi,' she told Dudu, 'I would just call Matodzi.'

'Who's Matodzi?'

'She's Shudu's cousin. I met her at the church.'

'I know of a girl called Asnath who lives not far from here. That girl has a hand for hair. I hope she's not fully booked.'

Dudu and Rabeka strolled to Asnath's place, and they found that she had customers for the day. She said she would do Rabeka's hair on Tuesday, a day before they went to Mafikeng.

'This girl is excellent,' said Rabeka, looking at how Asnath was plaiting a customer. 'I'm prepared to wait until Tuesday.'

On Tuesday Asnath called Rabeka an hour before their 14h00 appointment. She told Rabeka that she could not plait her hair as she had to take her mother to the hospital.

'I can squeeze you tomorrow,' said Asnath, 'When are you going to Mafikeng?'

'Tomorrow, at 15h00,' said highly disappointed Rabeka.

'I can do your hair at 08h00,' said Asnath. 'I'll be finished at 12h00.'

'It's okay.'

After speaking to Rabeka, Asnath received a call from Bathini, her cousin.

Bathini asked Asnath to plait her hair on Tuesday. 'Assy,' that was how Bathini addressed Asnath. 'We're going to perform for the Pan-African Drama festival in Ghana. Bra Junior is taking us there. Everything is ready; I just need a stunning plait to show the Ghananians that...'

'No, I'm sorry Thini. It won't be possible tomorrow.'

'Please Assy.'

'I have four appointments for the day; you know each customer takes four hours.'

'Can't you start with me?'

'No. I'll be plaiting an actress who's going to Mafikeng. I can't disappoint her. I should have plaited her today. Come on Thursday.'

'I'll come. Who's the actress you'll be plaiting?'

'She's Reebbs. Do you know her?'

'No,' lied Bathini.

On Tuesday Rabeka asked Dudu to take her luggage. She intended to go straight to the point of departure at 14h00.

At 10h00 Asnath had plaited half of Rabeka's head behind her house under a vine-tree when she heard the bang of a car doors. She went to look.

'It's my cousin,' said Asnath. 'But I told her to come tomorrow. She's with her boss.'

Rabeka had a voice: 'Got you, at last!'

When Rabeka turned her face she gasped when she saw Bathini and Junior appearing around the corner of the house. Spaza walked behind them.

'Do you know them?' asked Asnath.

'Yes,' responded nervous Rabeka.

Junior stood hands in pocket, giving Rabeka a sarcastic smile. 'Gotcha!!'

Bathini and Spaza jeered. Embarrassed, Rabeka felt like a cornered animal.

'What has she done?' asked perturbed Asnath.

'She knows,' said Junior, who pulled a chair, sat down and faced Rabeka. 'I knew that one day your gods would leave you high and dry.'

'Thini,' said Asnath, 'what has this child-of-people done?'

'It's a long story,' said Bathini.

'Bra June,' said Spaza, 'I told you that her foot has no nose! It couldn't smell that we would one day get her!'

Asnath continued to plait Rabeka's hair.

'What were you trying to do Reeb?' asked Junior. 'You were a nice humble girl from the village. I made you a star, and you show me your back when I expect to see a grateful face. Because you're now a city girl.'

Rabeka kept quiet.

'Please lower your voice, bra Junior,' pleaded Rabeka. 'I'm really embarrassed to be spoken to like this.'

'How did you feel biting the hand that raised to a higher level?' continued Junior. 'Because you're now a clever girl of Mamelodi. Your new culture is the dog eat dog.' Rabeka recalled how her cousin Thabang had coached her to leave Junior.

'Your life would not go smoothly because I was holding you with my heart. That's why you went to Gooshkah and he fired you and you...'

'Gooshkah didn't fire me! He was trying to...'

'You are lying! He told me he fired you because you behaved like a big fish in a small pond! And I know he's right! And you went to the State Theatre, and you were fired again. And you are trying to frame Bra Hloms for trying to seduce you!'

Rabeka's cell-phone rang, and Bathini grabbed it and answered it. 'Hallo...yes... this is sergeant Kgoro-ya-dira speaking, and I just want to inform you that Reeb is under arrest...yes at Ga-Rankuwa police station.'

Spaza waved a forefinger at Rabeka. 'Reeb, you've done us wrong and we have the right to revenge. Do you know that we can kidnap and keep you until your boss cancels the show?'

'No Spaza, we aren't going to do anything violent or criminal,' said Junior. 'But,' Junior smirked, 'we are going to delay you until the bus going to Mafikeng leaves without you - if they've someone to replace you.'

Junior, Bathini and Spaza laughed aloud.

'Okay bra Junior,' said Rabeka after a long moment of silence, 'you got me! And I want to apologise for how I deserted you. I don't blame you for being angry. I didn't want to hurt you by telling you straight that I wanted to join Gooshkah's group.'

'What was good that you found in Gooshkah's group that I didn't have? Don't you know that it is I who produced Gooshkah?'

'I think I was just misled.'

'Misled by who?'

Rabeka recalled aunt Mpule's words that an excuse puts blame on something other than you.

'Okay bra Junior, let me take responsibility for my action.'

'Now you are talking!' said Junior.

'Bra Junior, I made a wrong choice. I thought I had found the greener pastures. Please forgive me!'

Junior kept quiet, his face still stern.

'I am a young person, and I make mistakes sometimes. Please bra Junior. Haven't you made mistakes that you later regretted?'

Junior's face began to thaw, and he looked at his fingers. He shifted his glance towards Bathini; soon Junior and Bathini exchanged glances with Spaza.

'Bat and Spah,' said Junior, 'You are my witness.'

'Sure, bra June,' said Spaza.

'I'm also a witness,' said Asnath, 'Please forgive her, bra Junior. It's not a piece of wood that makes a mistake; people often err.'

A moment of silence followed. Junior kept quiet, a smile spreading all over his face.

'Well, I won't gain anything by refusing to forgive you,' said Junior. Asnath nodded. 'I agree with you that you made wrong choices' continued Junior. 'Who doesn't? Even us older guys make wrong choices. So I'm forgiving you, Reebs.'

'Thank you very much, bra Junior,' said Rabeka, a tear glinting at the corner of her eye.

'I also appreciate that you've forgiven Reebs,' said Asnath, 'I'm going to make tea and you're going to have a cuppa-tea of peace.'

'Sure, sure, Assy,' said Bathini.

Spaza nodded all smiles. Asnath finished Rabeka's plait and gave her a mirror to look at herself.

'You're stunning, Reebs,' complemented Bathini, as Rabeka admired her hair-style as she turned the mirror, 'heads of dudes in Mafikeng are going to turn.' Rabeka chuckled; Bathini, Junior and Spaza laughed.

Rabeka gave Junior a strong bear-hug. 'Thanks bra Junior! And from today the burden has fallen away, and I can live better without fear and guilt of meeting you.' Rabeka also bear-hugged Bathini and Spaza. Asnath paused to appreciate the scene before she went to make tea.

Rabeka stretched her right hand and grabbed Junior's left hands. In an instant four pairs of hands formed a chain of unity. Junior lifted his hands and other did likewise.

'Bra Junior,' said Rabeka, 'I owe you and I'll see how I can pay back the debt.'

'You don't owe me Reebs,' said Junior. 'Forgiveness is free. And unconditional.' They sat down as Asnath brought in tea on a tray. She poured out cups, and they started to sip and chew biscuits.

'You know why I needed you desperately?' asked Junior just before he bit a biscuit. 'I wanted to prepare for the annual Shosholoza Drama Award sponsored by the provincial Department of Arts and Culture. It was the third year that Gooshkah's drama group had won the competition, and the results were predictable.'

'We knew that he would always win,' said Bathini.

'This is because he had bribed the officials,' said Spaza.

'There's a very corrupt guy in the department,' Junior took over, 'His name is Zeph; he ensured that Gooshkah's group would win because he shared the prize money with him. If the amount was R50 000, Gooshkah pocketed R30 000, while a 'commission' of R15 000 landed in Zeph's greedy hands, and R5 000 was set aside to 'wash the hands' of the five judges appointed by him.

'We tipped off the media about Zeph's corruption but the department said those who could prove that a different group could have won must 'come forward' with evidence. So we decided that in stead of complaining to the media we should just prepare

an artistically superior production that could snatch the first position- whether Zeph liked it or not. I was certain that with an actress of Junior pointed to Rabeka with his index finger, 'your calibre we would win the award. I was tired of the second prize which was a desktop and a laptop computers; my eyes were on R50 000, and I was determined to grab it out of Gooshkah's hands. So I was very disappointed when you sided with the crook when I was the one who made it possible for you to voted the best performer during the Windybrow Arts Festival; I had hoped that your popularity would attract media attention that would make it difficult for the judges not to give us the first prize. '

We expected that with your participation,' said Spaza, 'we could win and chant: We came!'

'We performed!' said Bathini.

'We conquered!' shouted Bathini and Spaza.

They all laughed.

24 In Mafikeng the girls had their own rooms while the men shared. Dudu and Rabeka took the last two rooms at the end of the eastern wing of the building. The next day, the first Thursday of the month, Sol told the cast that he had a special announcement.

'I hope we've learned from our mistakes in Polokwane. During the weekend I saw a very interesting film about the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. You should have seen how the commander gave orders and the cadres all responded: "Yes commander!" He would say: 'You are going to be properly trained mentally and physically, and we are going to send you on missions, and not all missions will be easy-go.

'Some missions will be dangerous; the enemy might catch you, and your blood will nourish the tree of liberation, is that well-understood?' And they responded: "Yes commander!" 'So from today Ringo will be your commander, and he must be obeyed for he's my right-hand. There's too much work for me, so I need to delegate. Even in the bible Moses once complained to God that he was over-worked and God asked him to choose 70 people to assist him.' He gazed towards Dudu. 'Is that not so Dudu?'

'You are right bra Sol.'

'So, I've given him powers to hire and fire. I'm his general and he's my commander, is that well-understood!'

'Yes, General!'

'Now commander, over to you!'

Sol left.

'I'm your commander,' said Ringo, 'because I'm the general's right-hand man!'

'Yes commander!'

'If I say stand, you shall obey!'

'Yes commander!'

'If I say walk, you shall obey!'

'Yes commander!'

He pointed at Rabeka. 'If I say jump, you shall obey!'

Rabeka jumped.

Ringo addressed Rabeka. 'If I say lie on your back, you shall obey!'

Rabeka lay on her back.

'Yes commander!'

He pointed at Zakhele. 'If I say sit on her stomach, you shall obey!'

'Yes commander!'

Zakhele sat on her stomach.

He pointed at Sbu. 'If I say jump and sit on the neck of the man who sits on the woman's belly, you shall obey!'

'Yes commander!'

Sbu jumped but Rabeka rolled out of Zakhele, and Sbu landed awkwardly on Zakhele. The cast members laughed.

'No commander, no! I'm a young woman,' protested Rabeka.

'No commander' is not found in the dictionary of the war of liberation, is it well-understood!'

'Yes commander!'

The cast members laughed again.

On that first Saturday of March the cast went to busk at the shopping mall in Mafikeng, in order to create awareness about the performance. They were preparing to perform the wedding scene. Marlies as the bride, wearing a snow-white wedding dress, attracted the eyes of hordes of shoppers. Sbu as the groom wore black suit, a green shirt and a golden bow. Molefi as Archbishop Tutu wore a gown and held a bible with his right hand, and tapped his belly with the fingers of the free hand.

Archbishop cleared his throat, looking at the groom. 'Khongoloso Mkhonto-Mkhululi-we-

Sizwe- ka Luthuli wa Bubibjasegokgo-bo-ntlharile...'

'Wow-wow-hawu-hawuu!' exclaimed the cast.

'Order, please!' appealed Archbishop. 'All these are his names, and they're part of his history.'

'Khongoloso, Mkhonto-Mkhululi-we-Sizwe- ka Luthuli wa Bubi-bja-segokgo-bo-ntlharile Moroka-ka Langelibalele-Dube-ka-Tambo,' said Archbishop, matter-of-factly, 'will you have this woman to be your legally wedded wife, to live together in the sacred bond of marriage for five years?'

'I will,' said the groom.

The Archbishop's gaze shifted to the bride. 'Apartheidia Separate-Developmentina,

Wilhemina de Klerk-ina van der Botha-Vorster Verwoerd-Malan-Strijdom-

Hertzog van-Riebeck, will you have this man to be your legally wedded husband, to live together in the sacred bond of marriage for five years?'

'I will,' the bride replied.

The onlookers applauded.

'Thank you that you've enjoyed the little piece,' said Sbu, 'To see the whole show please go to Mmabana Arts Centre tonight.'

The shoppers dispersed and the cast went to the kombi, ready to take them to another part of the town.

Busi tapped the shoulder of Millicent, who walked in front of her. 'Where's Ringo?'

'He told me he's going to the bookings office.'

'You must wake up!'

'What do you mean?'

'You're in love with a skirt-chaser, so don't sleep, girl.'

'Have you seen him doing anything wrong?'

'I don't want to poke my nose into other people's affairs... I'm just saying wake-up! You can go and inquire from a security officer called Steve.'

25 The next day, after lunch Busi went speak to Millie. 'Did you go and find out from Steve?' asked Busi

'Yes! He says he found Ringo and Motla-le-pula making love in the back-stage rooms of the main theatre, on Friday.'

'Are your impressed with what he had done?'

'No!'

'Do you want him to stop?'

'Yes!'

'Do you know the medicine? Get another guy, it'll stop him immediately. I call that "stop nonsense." Tonight you can dodge him and go with us to a party organised by some nice guys from West Africa.'

When Millie came back from the party on Monday morning Ringo was furious and confronted her.

She stood, arms on her waist, arrogance on her face. 'I can do what you do to me!' In a fit of bad temper, Ringo beat her up and she went to Sol, who referred the matter to the Discom. She told the two remaining members of Discom, Lefty and Dudu, that she was going to the police station. But she changed her mind, packed her bags and left. A rumour soon spread that she had gone to stay with a West African dude.

When the cast members received their weekly salaries, Ringo remembered to take advantage of his position.

'You shall buy your commander a packet of sweets,' Ringo told Marlies'

'Yes commander!' said Marlies.

Ringo went to Zeb. 'You shall buy your commander a bottle of beer!'

'Yes commander! I can buy you a straight of whiskey!' said Zeb to the flattered 'Commander.'

In the evening Ringo commanded Sophie: 'Tonight you shall warm the bed of the commander!'

'The soldier won't mind two nights, but she's HIV/Positive.'

Ringo left Sophie alone, wondering if she was serious or was joking.

After the performance of the opening night, Busi joined Ringo at a table in the bar of the theatre. 'Please buy me a bottle of wine.'

'What will you give me?'

Busi chuckled. 'You're miserable because there's now no one to warm your bed. I can bring you a nice bird'

'Serious?'

'Yes!'

'Deal clinched!'

He bought her a bottle of wine.

On Saturday after the show Busi brought a young woman to Ringo, and whispered to him: 'Here's the bird I promised you.'

To the woman Busi said: 'Tshidi, meet Ringo my stage manager, make him happy. Okay?'

Tshidi chuckled. Ringo knew that Busi meant business and she had certainly brought him a 'nice bird.'

'Tshidi is my fan,' said Busi, 'and she wants to learn a lot about....'

'I'll teach her tonight,' said Ringo who grabbed Tshidi by her hand and left with her, smiling all the way to his room.

The next Friday in the evening, after the show Ringo saw his old flame, Tsakani, passing his room.

He beckoned her over. 'Tonight you shall warm your commander's bed.'

'The commander can go to hell!' responded Tsakani who knew Ringo was not joking.

On the next Saturday after the show Ringo bought Busi a bottle of wine. She gulped it down and was soon drunk.

Busi pinched Ringo's arm. '*Ag arme stepsel...*' she belched and hiccupped. 'You've no one to warm your bed.'

Ringo winked at her. 'Are you going to get me a nice bird again? Nothing for *mahala!*'

She guffawed. 'Don't you, for a change, want to taste a virgin?'

'I would love to. That'll rejuvenate my blood!'

'Go for Rabeka,' she giggled. 'Just be brave and instruct her to warm your bed.

You know sometimes the only way of catching a woman's attention is to just to be daring and say: "Come let me have sex with you!" I'm telling you from experience as a woman!

You can say: "Reeb, the commander wants you to warm his bed!"

Ringo thought over the suggestion. 'But Godmother is keeping a watchful eye over her.'

'Ringo, we are artists, we are creative; we can solve this.'

They were quiet for another moment.

Busi snapped her fingers. 'I got a plan! On Sunday evening I'll ask Dudu to come to my room; I'll tell her I want her to help, and I know she'll come because she thinks she's our social worker. While Dudu is in my room, you ask Rabeka to come to your room.'

Ringo took a slug and put down a glass. 'That's a brilliant idea!' enthused Ringo. 'I'm going to do just that!'

26 'Tonight you shall warm your commander's bed!' Ringo instructed Rabeka that Sunday evening

'No commander, you have asked for too much!'

'Whatever the commander requests is never too much!'

She gazed into Ringo's eyes. Ringo flashed a smile. 'I'm serious.'

'You must be joking,' said Rabeka. 'I thought by now you know that I'm not a test-driven type of a girl!'

'You're just like any other girl. Listen, don't try to play hard with your commander!'

Rabeka walked out of Ringo's room.

Ringo went to Busi's room carrying a bottle of whiskey.

'Reeb said "no ways!"' said Ringo. 'No girl ever says "No!" to me, come rain or hail! I'm going to sleep with the girl. There will come a day when she'll shout: 'Hallelujah!' under me.'

'Yes, you are going to sleep with her!'

She lifted her glass and drank. 'But I think you must fire her?'

'Fire her?'

'Yes! You have powers to...'

'Yes-yes-yes!'

'You must fire her, humiliate her! And tell her she can get her job back only if she's prepared to lie down first.'

On Monday evening Ringo summoned Rabeka.

'Reeb, I'm sick and tired of your behaviour.'

'What do you mean?'

'You're a proud girl, and you're generally a trouble-maker.'

'Please explain what you mean by...'

Ringo pointed at Rabeka. 'Remember I've powers to hire and fire. And my word is final. Based on the information received and my observation, I, Ringo Mosimanegape Mabusela, have decided that it's in the best interest of the group that I should fire you.'

Ringo paused to gauge the effect of his pronouncement.

He pointed at her. 'You think you're irreplaceable? I know your part and the play will go on without you! The audience will have no problem with me doing your part!'

Rabeka shook her head. 'No, I'm not going to accept that!' She walked away. 'I'm going to bra Sol!'

'You're just wasting your time. Bra Sol has delegated powers to me!'

Rabeka knocked at Sol's room without anyone answering.

Marlies saw Rabeka knocking. 'Are you looking for bra Sol?'

'Yes!'

'I saw him going out in a car with Lefty.'

'Okay, I'll come later.'

As Rabeka entered her room her cellphone rang.

'I just felt like calling you, Rabbeh,' said aunt Mpule. 'I don't know why. How's

life?’

‘Aunt Mpule, it seems the safety belt of prayer isn't helpful.’

‘Why are you saying that?’

‘I don't want to bother you and God.’

‘No, you cannot speak like that, Rabbeh. What's the problem?’

Rabeka told her aunt all what had happened. ‘Perhaps my parents are right that I must just forget about this acting business and get a secure job; but I got a secure job at the State Theatre and someone still wanted to take me to bed.’

‘I'm sorry to hear about that.’

Rabeka whimpered: ‘Why is this happening to me? I don't know if things will ever come right in my life auntie! The situation is hopeless and I don't think it'll ever ...’

Rabeka sobbed.

‘Rabbeh, no matter what challenges you're facing you can change that situation through prayers and your confession of faith. Just stand on the promises of the word of God, is all I can say. My girl, just tell yourself: “I've come too far to turn back.” And you're going to see God's hand at work in your life!’

An hour later Sol arrived with Lefty, and Rabeka told them all what happened.

Sol was very angry and he called Ringo. ‘Why have you fired Rabeka?’

‘I've in fact suspended her.’

‘For what?’

‘General insubordination!’

‘Please motivate that!’

‘Since you promoted her to assistant-director...’

‘I've never promoted her,’ responded Sol. ‘I just asked her once to direct because she told me she wanted to grow, and on that day I was very busy.’

‘Bra Sol, this girl is generally a trouble-maker.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘She's causing the girls to disobey their boyfriends.’

‘Who are those girls? And does that affect the production?’

‘Bra Sol, we aren't in jail; and having sex is a normal part of our lives. Reeb's is influencing the girls, telling them she's a virgin and that sex before marriage is bad. Some couples are fighting and this is causing instability among the cast members.’ Sol paused and made eye contact with Rabeka.

‘Ringo, you don't have any concrete case against Rabeka. So I'm vetoing your decision that she must be fired or suspended.’

27 The following day Busi met Ringo at the theatre bar.

'I'm angry that bra Sol has challenged my decision,' said Ringo.

'Why must Sol give you power you cannot enjoy?' asked Busi, 'He said your duty is to hire and fire - and then when you fire the insubordinate bitch, he vetoes your decision.'

They kept quiet for a moment.

'Ringo, you must get revenge!' Busi said the last word as they parted.

On Wednesday evening after the performance, Busi again met Ringo at the bar.

'I've been thinking about how you can get revenge.'

'I don't think I want to have anything to do with this girl. I pressed a wrong button, and I just don't want to touch her anymore.'

Busi gulped her beer, her eyes on Ringo. 'Come on, don't chicken out, Ringo!. Try one last thing. If you go for it I'll give you another bird.'

Ringo roused as if from drowsing.

'You mean it?'

'Yes! Ringo, I've an excellent method of revenge. My cousin is working for a pharmaceutical company and he told me of a white powder that he's selling to guys who want to discipline women who refuse to have sex with them.'

'Is there such a thing? Is it a drug?'

'Relax, Ringo. It's just a white powder which... I forgot the name of the drug. But I'll call my cousin, and he'll tell me. But what's important is what it does. And I can assure you it can... it will work.'

'How?'

'Very simple. A little bit of the powder in a glass or cup of tea will cause Reeb to be drowsy; and when she's drowsy you can help yourself... you know what I mean. And she'll never be a virgin. She won't remember anything, and no-one will know.'

Ringo spent a few moments thinking. 'Okay call your cousin.'

Busi rose and kissed Ringo. 'Super!'

On Thursday evening after the show, Ringo and Busi continued with their scheme.

'When is your cousin bringing the stuff?'

'Tomorrow afternoon.'

'Great!' he paused for a moment, 'But how are we going to get the powder into Reeb's tea or cool-drink?'

'Ringo, we are performing artists and this is no big deal!'

'The question is how. You know once upon a time the mice agreed to hang a bell on the cat's neck, but they forgot to ask: "Who will hang the bell?"'

'I gave the matter thought,' said Busi, 'Dudu likes me; because during the meeting when I pretended to be having some problems, I promised her that I would change. So if we ask her to come to a party she'll agree; you'll see.'

28 On Friday afternoon during a short 'smoke break,' Busi called Ringo aside.

'My cousin has brought the stuff,' said Busi, her face lit by excitement. She searched her hand-bag and took out a transparent plastic bag containing a white powder.

'He says the drug is called 'Kate''

Ringo smiled.

'Let's not waste time Ringo!' continued Busi, 'Let do it on Sunday evening.'

'Let's discuss other details during our next meeting. We don't have enough time now,' suggested Busi. 'Today let's invite Dudu and Reebbs.'

'That's fine. What shall we say is the purpose of the party?'

'We tell them it's for forgiveness and reconciliation.'

Rabeka asked Dudu: 'Should we attend?'

'I think we should, Reebbs,' responded Dudu. 'Let's be nice to our enemies.'

'I don't know why I'm suspicious.'

'Let's attend, Reebbs,' Dudu persuaded her. 'When your enemy wants you to forgive him why not cooperate?'

Rabeka agreed. Her suspicions were allayed when she recalled that Busi had suggested they could come with Zakhele and Sbu.

'It was convenient to use the language of Christians; forgiveness and reconciliation.'

Busi chuckled. 'Yes. I had no doubt that Dudu would take the bait.'

She bared her open palms for Ringo to give her a high five, and then Ringo bared his for her to smack.

That Sunday evening as Rabeka, Dudu, Sbu and Zakhe entered Ringo's flat they could hear gospel music blaring on a CD player. Ringo and Busi, all ear-to-ear smiles, gave their guests hearty hugs. Margie was also there to lend a helping hand to the host. Ringo gestured towards the seats. 'Guys, make yourselves comfortable and help yourselves!'

They sat down and began to pick at the snacks on paper plates on the coffee-table.

Ringo told them that he was delighted they had come to the party. 'As we are all members of the same drama company,' he said, looking at Rabeka, 'I just thought it would be a good idea to renew and to rebuild trust and friendship.'

Busi smiled and nodded in support.

'So friends,' continued Ringo, 'let bygones be bygones!'

They applauded, then laughed, shared some jokes and chatted. Meanwhile, Busi had done her 'research' and had found out that Rabeka liked Milo with Nespray powdered milk. Ringo and Busi were relieved when they saw Rabeka sipping her Milo -which was well laced with 'Kate'.

Twenty minutes later, Rabeka unzipped her denim jacket. 'I feel hot and drowsy. I just feel like sleeping.'

'Okay,' said Busi. 'Perhaps you must go and have a rest.'

Dudu stood up. 'Let me take Reebbs to the room.'

'No, you mustn't go Dude,' said Busi. 'You are our main guest in the absence of Reeb. Why can't the guys take her to the room? After all Reeb and Zakhele have made peace.'

Dudu was persuaded. Sbu and Zakhele accompanied Rabeka to her room. Dudu, Busi, Margie and Ringo continued to listen to gospel music and had more juice, and snacks. Sbu and Zakhele returned to the party. Time moved on and the young night became older.

'Where's Ringo?' asked Dudu.

'Didn't you hear him when he said he was going to the toilet?' said Busi. Dudu was becoming unsettled.

'He must have gone to make a few calls at the coin-telephone,' reasoned Margie. Dudu glanced at her wrist-watch. Twenty minutes later, Dudu told Busi that she wanted to check on Rabeka.

'Please tell Ringo,' said Dudu, 'that we appreciate having been invited to the party.' 'I'll tell him. And thanks for attending.'

* * *

Busi smiled, and high fived Margie.

'Tonight the angel is losing her virginity!' said Busi.

'Yes! she'll stop saying: "I'm a virgin, I'm a virgin! We'll be the same as her from tonight!'

Busi laughed aloud. 'We must discipline this pompous holier-than-thou girl; she thinks she's angel living among a bunch of devils!'

As Ringo entered the corridor leading to Rabeka's room, he switched off the light. As the coordinator of accommodation he had a spare key for Rabeka's room. He unlocked the room and entered.

He surveyed her and smiled.

'I have a very strange feeling,' Dudu told Zakhele and Sbu, as they approached Rabeka's room, 'that something very evil is happening.'

'Happening to Reeb?' asked Sbu.

'Yes. I don't know why.'

Busi knocked at the door of Rabeka's room. They waited; there was no answer. Dudu knocked harder and waited; still no response. They exchanged glances.

'She must have fallen into a deep sleep,' said Sbu.

Busi stood quietly for a moment. 'She hasn't switched off the lights; Sbu, go and peer through her curtain and check if she's asleep.'

Sbu came back a few minutes later. 'She's not on her bed.'

Busi became alarmed. 'Where can she be?'

They were silent.

'Can she be in Lefty's room?' asked Zakhele.

'I don't think so,' disagreed Sbu. 'She was very drowsy.'

'Let's go and look outside,' said Dudu.

'Do you think...' asked Sbu.

'Just follow me!'

29 Ringo walked towards the trees towards the end of the yard, which was bordered by a tall electric fence. He carried Rabeka on his shoulder, wrapped in a beach-towel.

As he passed next to an old toilet used by the security staff a security on guard who had not closed the toilet door, saw him. The area was dark. The security guy's safety instinct was piqued when he saw Ringo carrying something; so he followed, without making any noise. He pussyfooted like a cat, stalking Ringo.

Ringo laid Rabeka on the beach towel he was covering her with. He first unbuttoned her shirt and removed her bra. He lay on her and began to kiss her lips, all over her face and her neck; he also kissed and sucked her breasts. He then undressed her lower part of her body, and she was completely naked; he explored her pubic area and then her vagina with his right hand. Fully aroused he pulled down his trousers and his underpants.

He opened her legs and squatted between her thighs; he lay on her and tried to penetrate her without success. He took a bottle of Vaseline out of the pocket of his trousers and applied generously.

The security guy slowly raised his sjambok, as Ringo felt his cock, tight and erect, ready to destroy her virginity.

'Hey stop it!!' shouted the security man as Ringo lay on Rabeka, his waist arched. Ringo dismounted Rabeka and ran away, the security guy hot on his heels.

As Dudu, Sbu and Zakhele walked towards the willow trees, they saw a silhouetted figure running towards them.

'Hey, catch that man!' shouted the security guard.

Sbu and Zakhele ran, overtook Ringo and caught him.

'Ringo, what are you doing naked?' asked Zakhele.

'And where is Reeb?' asked Sbu.

'Leave me alone! Leave me alone!' shouted Ringo trying to wriggle out of two tight pairs of hands. The security man shone his torch straight into Ringo's eyes. 'Leave me alone! You're interfering with my privacy!'

'Bring him over here!' said security guard, who led them back to the way he had come. 'Over here; a woman lying down.'

He shone the torch on Rabeka. Dudu wailed. 'That's my girl!'

Wailing Dudu dressed Rabeka.

Security man turned away his face away. So did Sbu and Zakhele. The security guard whipped Ringo on his buttocks with his sjambok. 'I caught you raping a drunk girl!' Dudu shook her head. 'It's impossible! She cannot be drunk! Ringo what have you done to Reeb?'

Ringo kept silent.

Sbu wielded a stick. Ringo what have you done to Reeb?'

Ringo never said a word.

Sbu and Zakhele began to punch Ringo with their bare knuckles and kicked him. Dudu broke thick tree branches and handed them to Sbu and Zakhele who lashed a screaming Ringo all over his body.

'You've broken my arm!' said Ringo.

'Die, you ugly dog!' shouted Sbu.

'Let me go and fetch a sharp knife!' said Zakhele. 'We're going to castrate you!' At that moment Sol arrived holding Lefty by his hand.

'Please let me at least put on my underpants,' pleaded Ringo.

Sol looked on sternly as Ringo put on his underpants. Soon Zeb, Francois, Marlies, Terrence, Walala, Bheki and Bertha appeared and shuffled to the spot where Reeb was still lying.

'What has actually happened?' asked Sol.

'Bra Sol, I'll explain everything,' said Dudu.

Security hand-cuffed Ringo, who was now dressed; he had black eye and wheals on his back.

At the police station, a charge of abduction and attempted rape was laid by Sbu and Zakhele on behalf of Rabeka. Meanwhile Dudu and Sol had accompanied an unconscious Rabeka to the hospital.

30 That Monday afternoon, when sombre Dudu and Sol entered the cubicle in Rabeka's ward, they found a doctor taking her blood pressure.

When the doctor heard their steps he turned towards them. 'Are you her relatives?'

'Yes,' responded Dudu, 'we are with her in the drama group.'

Dudu and Sol shuffled closer to the bed; the doctor gave them a moment to have look at Rabeka: she was lying face-up on the bed, supported by two pillows, a drip inserted in her right arm. A transparent plastic pipe had been inserted into her nostril.

Dudu wiped a tear. 'How's she, doctor?'

'The situation is stabilising. By the evening her immune system should have picked up remarkably.'

Sol nodded.

'Can I speak to you?' said the doctor.

The doctor led Dudu and Sol to a vacant office.

He opened a file and read. 'When the patient arrived the doctor-in-charge said he suspected food-poisoning. But the symptoms suggested something else: something she has eaten or drunk has been laced with a DRD - date rape drug.'

'What?' asked Dudu.

'Date rape drug.'

'I haven't heard of such a drug. What does it do?'

'I'll tell you,' the medico paused, 'DRDs are used to assist a sexual assault, which is any type of sexual activity that a person doesn't agree to. Because of the effects of these drugs, victims are often physically helpless, are unable to refuse sex and can't remember what happened.'

'But how can Ringo do such a horrible thing to my sweet girl?' asked Dudu, her gaze directed at Sol.

The doctor smiled at Dudu. 'I know how bad you can feel when what I'm telling you happens to someone close to you. What I'm telling you is based on what we observed when the patient arrived here. Symptoms of a date rape drug called Ketamine include numbness, slurred speech, and problems with breathing and vomiting; these four

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symptoms...' he pointed to his file, 'have been observed.'

Dudu covered her face with her palms and sobbed. Sol comforted her.

'Why did Ringo do such a terrible thing to my girl?' asked Dudu again.

The doctor kept quiet, affording Dudu a moment to recover from the shock.

'And tell us doctor, has she really been raped?' asked Sol

'The patient's sexual organs have been tampered with, but rape has not taken place' said the doctor, much to the visible relief of Dudu and Sol

The doctor flipped over some pages in the bed-letter, until he reached a paper where there was a photo-stated copy of a vagina. He pointed with a pen. 'Here is the urethra that takes out urine, and here is the clitoris; it's only the urethra that has been bruised; it could be the result of a failed penetration, the person doing this panicked and hit the urethra. If the patient was raped I would refer her to the police; she would have to do a urine test. Ketamine leaves the system quickly and makes it difficult to prove; Rohypnol and GHB leave the body in 72 and 12 hours.'

'Would you please give us the names of the rape drugs?'

The doctor handed Dudu five pages. 'You can have them. I got them from a website.'

'Thank you doctor. And what's website?'

'You first get into "www.google.co.za;" you then type 'Date Rape Drugs,' and press "enter."' He smiled. 'And you'll get so much information that you can spend the whole month reading.'

'Thank you very much doctor.'

The medical man scribbled something on the bed-letter before he gestured towards Dudu.

'You and the patient need counselling. We have a hospital social worker who'll be available to you.'

Dudu wiped a tear. 'Thank you, doctor.'

That Monday evening during the patients' visiting hours Dudu and Sol entered Rabeka's cubicle. They found a nursing sister feeling the pulse on Rabeka's lame arm, and taking her temperature, and they waited as she wrote in the file.

'How's the patient sister?' asked Dudu.

'Doing fine today,' said the nursing sister, radiating a smile, 'that's why we've removed the feeding tube.'

Sol and Dudu looked pityingly at Rabeka whose chest went up and down as she breathed, her face serene.

'She has rested enough,' said the sister. 'She can awake any minute from now. But please be patient in case she takes a little longer.'

The sister put Rabeka's arm into the bed, pulled the blanket over her chest and left the cubicle.

'Thank you sister,' said Sol.

Dudu and Sol waited patiently. A woman in civilian clothes entered the ward holding a desk diary and a pen. 'I'm the social worker and I was looking for Rabeka Maru-a-pula's relatives. Are you them?'

'We are in the same drama group with her.'

'Okay, you came at the right time,' said the social worker, her eyes on Rabeka. Fifteen minutes before the visiting time expired, Rabeka roused and sat up. 'Where am I?' she asked.

'You're in Mafikeng hospital.'

'Why am I here? Was I involved in an accident?' She examined her limbs. 'No.' Dudu and Sol kept quiet.

'I saw something terrible happening to me,' continued Rabeka after a moment of silence, 'I saw myself wearing my night-dress, with arms hand-cuffed; suddenly a bull-dog came to me and I thought he would maul me but he gripped my night dress at the waist with his jaws, and pulled me off the bed. I was horrified and when I screamed no voice came out of my mouth.'

'A few moments later the dog and I were in a forest; the beast pulled away my dress with his snout at my thighs and tore my panty apart and opened my thighs with powerful paws. The dog sniffed at my private parts and I saw him being aroused; he was about to penetrate his male thing into me when suddenly five men with shining faces, wearing long dresses shining brighter than silver, came to the scene; the mighty men were holding flaming swords; they pointed their weapons to the dog, and it yelped and ran away.'

'And what did the men say to you?' asked Dudu.

'They broke the hand-cuffs, covered me with a gown, and led me out of the jungle; they dropped me at my home, smiled at me and disappeared.'

'I have no doubt those men were angels,' said Sol.

Dudu nodded with tearful eyes.

'We must now tell you that you have survived a date rape,' said the social worker.

'A date rape?' asked incredulous Rabeka.

Dudu told Rabeka all what happened. Rabeka sobbed bitterly, blaming herself for attending the party organised by Ringo.

Dudu wanted to respond but the social worker restrained her. 'Let Reeb's speak,' advised the social worker, 'and take out all the hurt and pain.'

In the quiet moment that followed, Rabeka felt very down, cheap and dirty; she was very angry with Ringo. 'I wish I was living in a country where rapists are castrated! Yes, I heard of a province in Nigeria controlled by Moslems, where they discipline people like Ringo!'

Torrents of tears poured out of her eyes, and Dudu put her hand on Rabeka's shoulders.

'But why must these terrible things happen to me?' asked Rabeka. 'I've had enough, and I think I must forget about the performing arts, because there'll always be men trying to take advantage of ...'

'No, you can't quit, Reeb's!' said Dudu. 'You've gone too far to think of going back!'

'Please don't tell me I must keep being someone's target of lust, sis Dudu!'

Rabeka turned her back on Dudu and continued sobbing. During the next thirty minutes the social worker tried to give Rabeka counselling. Dudu dialled aunt Mpule, explained everything and asked her to speak to Rabeka. Rabeka waved her hand. 'Please tell her I'm not ready to speak to anyone at the moment.'

As Dudu and Sol walked along the corridor that joined two wings of the hospital they met Zakhele and Sbu.

'Where's Reeb's?' asked Sbu.

'She's in the female ward,' said Dudu, 'But please don't visit her now; she's

resting.'

'In what ward has Ringo been admitted?' asked Dudu.

'Ward 37. He's under police guard,' said Zakhele. 'He pleads that he was drunk and that he lost his mind; he blamed Busi for organising a drug, but Busi is denying the allegation.'

'He cannot look at us in the eyes,' added Sbu, 'and he said "I'm sorry guys." But I said to him: "Go and tell that to your mother!"'

'He has fired himself,' said Sol 'I've been too nice to him, not realising I was bringing up a monster. And I warned him on many occasions to stay away from Busi, and he wouldn't listen. Now he's sitting with hands full of shit! And he must go to court and face the wrath of the law. Attempted rape is a serious offence; it's like attempted murder! This time I'm not going to cover his back.'

'Let's go and sit on the lawn and discuss,' suggested Sol.

Outside the hospital, they saw cast members at the gate, forlornness weighing down their faces. Marlies was leading Lefty by his hand. When Sol inquired about Busi, Margie told him that she had gone to consult a private doctor.

'For obvious reasons,' said Sol, 'the show that should be taking place in Taung next week, has been cancelled. We cannot change what has happened but we can decide that it's not going to weigh us down. We cannot all cry; we are artists and must find the creative way of comforting Rabeka.'

They held a meeting that lasted for an hour.

On Wednesday afternoon after Rabeka was discharged, Dudu walked with her and led her to the hospital's recreation hall.

Here Rabeka was surprised to find members of the cast, nursing sisters, doctors and senior administration personnel. When Dudu and Rabeka entered all the people stood and applauded, cheering: 'Welcome Reebbs! Welcome Reebbs!!'

Dudu led Rabeka to a table where Pontsho, Sol, Lefty and Marlies were sitting. Rabeka was delighted that Pontsho had come; she had missed him. Rabeka sat on a special chair was covered by white sheet and festooned with carnations.

'What's happening here?' asked Rabeka.

'It's your welcome party,' Sol told her.

Rabeka gave Sol a bear-hug and kissed him on his cheeks.

Waiters and waitresses from a local catering company served all with cool-drinks, and wine. Starters were served.

Thirty minutes later the Chief Executive Office stood. 'Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the first Patient of the Year Day, held in honour of Reebbs Maru-a-pula!'

The audience applauded.

'What motivated us to organize lunch for Reebbs and the cast, is the fact that we want to forge a partnership with the performing artists, who have played a significant role in health awareness.'

After lunch, Rabeka was presented with a gift of cosmetics, a bouquet of roses and a motivational book.

As Rabeka sat down and was congratulated by Pontsho, she saw the cast members going to the back of the elevated stage.

She rushed to Sol. 'Bra Sol, what's happening? Are you performing?'

'Yes! They asked for snippets of the play,' said Sol. 'You can sit down and relax for today it's your day.'

'No, bra Sol! I'm not going to sit down! A performer I'll always be! And I can perform the parts that should have been performed by Busi, cos I know her lines.' Rabeka ascended to back-stage. As she was waiting for the performers before her to complete their lines she scanned the audience, and she spotted two people who attracted the audience's eyes as they took their seats. She gasped when she identified the people as Pastor Jackie and aunt Mpule.

For 30 minutes they rendered parts of the play, including the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, the wedding scene the National Party and the ANC and their divorce, the World Soccer Cup results and the retirement of Nelson Mandela from public life. Rabeka felt she was performing for her two special guests who kept smiling, waving and cheering with every ounce of their energy. The cast received a standing ovation.

31 As the cast members were packing their costumes and re-arranging the furniture, Rabeka rushed towards the audience where she found Pastor Jackie and aunt Mpule waiting expectantly. They hugged and kissed her. Their screams of joy attracted the attention of the people walking out of the hall. Aunt Mpule and Rabeka laughed aloud, gazed into each other's eyes, wiping tears.

'What a surprise! What puts you here?' asked Rabeka as she and her guests walked to the hospital's cafeteria.

'We are here because we care,' said aunt Mpule, as they sat down and ordered juices.

Pastor smiled. 'We've come to take you home.'

They all laughed - but the mood was changing from lightheartedness to seriousness.

'We've heard of the bad things that have happened to you,' said the pastor as he put his glass down. 'But we rejoice that God's hand has intervened.'

'Yes, God is good, pastor,' agreed aunt Mpule.

'You know, God loves turning our negatives into positives,' said pastor. 'No one enjoys suffering, but your present suffering is a preparation for the future.... I can talk about Joseph in the bible.'

'But here at home we have Nelson Mandela,' aunt Mpule took the discussion further, 'spending 27 years in prison as a preparation for leadership of the country and the world.'

'Remember,' said Pastor Jackie, 'Blessed is the woman who perseveres through trials, for when she has stood the test, she will receive the crown of life.'

'Yes, pastor is right,' agreed aunt Mpule, 'When God gives you the crown He's saying: 'You've passed another life's test, now you're ready for a level of new blessings. Do you remember the wonderful feeling when you passed your hardest tests at school?' Rabeka's face brightened. 'Yes auntie!'

'Our advice is,' said the man of God, 'run with patience the race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, as it's stated in the Book of Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2.'

'We know that it can be very frustrating,' said aunt Mpule, 'when it seems the devil is thwarting your plans while others seem to be more successful than you.' Rabeka nodded, tears glinting in her eyes.

'In life you must never compare yourself with others,' pastor went on, 'the Bible talks about "the race" that is before you. This means you're not called to run someone's else's race. No. This also means you can't compete with others. If someone else is successful it doesn't mean you're failing; it depends on the objectives.'

'Yes, take for instance two men who are building their houses,' said aunt Mpule. 'While one lays a not-too-deep foundation and starts building a bungalow, the other one takes his time to dig deep because he wants to erect a five-story building. The one building a one-floor house may finish his building and even start living in it while the five-story man is still digging the foundation.'

'The one-floor builder,' said the man of God, 'may even jeer at the five-story man, asking him mockingly: "*Hawu*, are you still digging? Can you see I've finished and I'm living in my own house?" But what the one-floor guy doesn't realise is that they aren't aiming at the same thing; or they don't have the same objectives. The five-story man who spends a long time digging, knows that his foundation has to be deep enough to carry the tall building he intended to erect, for the higher you want to build, the deeper your foundation ought to be.'

'Yes,' continued aunt Mpule, 'At the end of the day, when both houses are built, the difference will be seen between the two buildings. If the five-floor man became discouraged because the one-floor guy next-door neighbour had already moved into a new house while he's still digging his foundation, he would have never completed his masterpiece.'

'Whatever you're going through,' advised pastor, 'focus on your own race. Fix your eyes on the Master, knowing that your reward is coming, like it has come for the patient hard-working guy, digging a foundation for a beautiful five-story house. Hallelujah!'

'Amen!' said aunt Mpule and Rabeka almost simultaneously. Rabeka wiped a tear. 'Thank you very much for your encouraging words, Pastor Jackie and aunt Mpule, and I really treasure them.' Aunt Mpule smiled. 'Now we want to answer your question about why we are here. The first reason why we are here: the Pastor is getting married, and you must attend the wedding, as a bridesmaid.'

'Congratulations Pastor Jackie!' said highly thrilled Rabeka. 'And when is the wedding?'

'First Saturday of June,' said Pastor 'It's some weeks from now; so you can prepare.'

Rabeka chuckled, giving the pastor a congratulatory hand-shake.

'But apart from the Pastor's wedding,' said aunt Mpule, 'we've come to take you home.'

'Are you serious you?' asked Rabeka, her glance shifting to the pastor. Pastor smiled. 'Yes, we're serious.'

Rabeka pause thoughtfully. 'Were you sent by my mother?'

'We spoke to her,' said aunt Mpule. 'But we didn't tell her we're coming to take you home. We want to take her by surprise.'

'We decided to invest time and money in you,' said pastor, 'Because we are shepherds, we can't fold our arms when the wolves of Gauteng are feasting on the pride of the village. You must come home and be involved in one of the community projects. The church has reached a financial position where we can pay your monthly salary as a youth worker.'

'I hear you, aunt Mpule and Pastor Jackie. But I cannot just be bundled off like a kid.'

Aunt Mpule smiled. 'We don't mean to embarrass you, Rabbeh. Our method may be wrong but our motive is right.'

Pastor gestured towards aunt Mpule, smiling. 'She's right. The bible says we have the responsibility to snatch out people who have fallen into fire. We may hurt them as we pull them out to safety. Lest we face God's judgment.'

'It was wonderful seeing you on stage instead of in a hospital bed, and we really appreciate that you haven't quit dreaming,' said aunt Mpule as they walked out of the cafeteria towards the car, 'and we're proud of you.'

'Thank you auntie, I don't know how to thank you and the pastor for having been available to me during difficult times in my life.'

'We are here on this planet to be a blessing to others,' said aunt Mpule,

'Everything God created was meant to give' added the pastor, 'He created the sun to give light during the day, and the moon and stars during the night.'

'And He created the flowers to give beauty. So I'm here for you, Rabbeh,' said aunt Mpule.

32 Two weeks later, on Saturday afternoon Thabang visited Rabeka who had been staying at Dudu's house since returning from Mafikeng. Thabang did not waste time in asking what had happened, and Rabeka gave her a tummyful.

'And how do you feel, RB?' asked Thabang.

'I've recovered completely, Thabs. I've received counselling from the hospital and Christian counseling. And straight from counselling Dudu and I spent three days at a hotel.'

'Where?'

'Midrand Protea. Bra Sol, our director, sponsored the hotel accommodation.'

'He's a good guy. And where's the guy who did the terrible thing?'

'He's still at the hospital. I've forgiven him. If people of Burundi and Rwanda who had been killing one another can forgive one another, why can't I forgive Ringo. What will I gain by begrudging him? Sis-Dudu and I have agreed that we should ask the court to commute Ringo's attempted rape sentence to a community service.'

'Is that possible?'

'I hope so. We shall consult lawyers and social workers; we feel punishing him won't help anyone, but if given an opportunity... You know if you can change a thief or a murderer into a policeman, the community gains more.'

'Okay! So what are your plans?'

'Last week, sis-Dudu and I were invited to run a two-day workshop on Date Rape Drugs, and next week I'm going to spend two days doing research on the website at the

library. I'm going to coordinate a project about the Date Rape Drugs support group.'

'Mh, I wonder if you'll have time for fun.'

Rabeka chuckled.

'Does that mean you'll no longer be an actress?' asked Thabang. 'What about the dreams you used to tell us about?'

'That hasn't changed, and will never change. My dream is to study and to complete a degree or a diploma in performing arts in America. I want to major in acting, singing and dancing. I intent to be a complete performer. Knowledge is empowerment.'

33 On the Friday of the first workshop Rabeka was at the hall an hour early, to make certain that when the girls arrived the session should be ready. Thanks to the thorough training she had received from joint workshops with the police and social workers, she felt excellently equipped for the first workshop. As the girls entered the venue, Rabeka was amazed to see Bathini.

Rabeka hurried towards Bathini and gave her a hug. 'What puts you here today? Are you accompanying someone?'

'I came to attend the workshop.'

'Why didn't I see your name as we processed the applications?'

'I used the name of Jacqueline.'

Rabeka smiled. 'Okay! You're most welcome.'

'Thanks Reeb!''

Rabeka told the group members about how she had met Bathini in Junior's group.

Recalling the slogan in Junior's group, Rabeka turned to Bathini and shouted. 'We came!'

'We saw!' responded Bathini.

'We conquered!!!' chanted both of them.

The two high-fived and hugged and roared with laughter, much to the fascination of Dudu and the group members.

'Please tell bra Junior to call me,' said Rabeka.

'I will,' said Bathini.

Rabeka lead Bathini to a corner. Bathini told Rabeka about her date-rape which had happened when she had gone to her cousin's party in Ga-Rankuwa a month before.

'Your cousin? Asnath who plaited my hair?' inquired concerned Rabeka.

'No, not Asanth. it's her younger sister, Dorothy.'

Bathini said she was so depressed that she had even considered a suicide.

The workshop started. Dudu welcomed the girls and left everything in Reeb's 'competent hands.'

Following tea, the session kicked off with introductions and some 'ice-breaking' exercises that helped the members to relax. Rabeka had already written an outline of the workshop on some flip-charts which she had pasted with pieces of prestik on a wall facing the chairs that had been arranged in an oval shape. She read with them the outline: 'What are rape drugs/What do the drugs look like?/ What effect do these drugs have on the body?/ How can I protect myself from being a victim?'

After taking a breath Rabeka still holding a pen with which she was pointing, smiled at the group. 'Although we use the term "date rape," most experts prefer the term

"drug-facilitated sexual assault." It makes sense nèh?"

Rabeka dished out information which was lapped up by participants for the next 45 minutes.

On the item: *What effect do these drugs have on the body?* Rabeka put up charts for the girls to write the effects of the three drugs. She found a moment to browse and to read the woman's magazine. She flipped right to the last page in order to read an article she had not yet read, an article by a guest columnist entitled: 'Lastword.' Her searching eye soon landed on the beginning of a paragraph: *'I adopted as my mantra the words of a song which says: 'I'd rather be alone than be unhappy.'*

She nodded with a twinkle in her eye. Her eye seached further down the page: *The last relationship didn't work out? Don't worry, the next one will be better. Just put on your high-heeled shoes, your mascara and your favourite lipstick and hit the road, lifting your chin! You never know who'll smile back!* Rabeka had found solace in what she had just read. She caught herself laughing aloud as if she were alone.

During the last shorter session she presented a talk on 'What are dreams?' and 'How Ordinary embraces his dream.' Just before they left they all stood and joined hands, and she led them through the group affirmation: *I was put on this earth to make a contribution. I wasn't created just to consume resources, to eat, breathe and take up space. No! My Creator has made me to make a difference on planet earth.*

34 On the fourth and last Friday Rabeka was ready for the final workshop session. An hour before it was due to begin, Rabeka was in the kitchen of the hall with the two aunties who were employed by the city council as cleaners; they were helping in preparing the snacks for the closing workshop. Dudu had gone to the city to do other chores.

Because it was a special workshop the girls had made efforts to put on their best dresses; most had also braided or 'stretched and fried' their hair, looking even more gorgeous. Rabeka had worn a new dress, and had plaited her hair: she was assured by the mirror that she looked stunning. Paying Rabeka a complement, one girl said she reminded her of Ayanda, a singer and a Soul Sunday TV presenter.

During the last session, the girls asked Reeb's personal questions about her dreams, as they had agreed. She told them about how she was compelled to discontinue her studies when the technikon closed down, and how she met TM. She mentioned how she had embraced being an excellent performing artist as her dream. Regarding the 'Giants of the valley,' she mentioned -without getting into details- her experiences with Gooshkah, Mahlomola and Ringo.

'Would you say that successful, powerful black men are too quick to abuse power?' asked one of the girls during Q&A time.

'No! It's not a question of colour,' said Rabeka. 'The Director of my last production is black, but he did not abuse power.'

'Have you realised your dream? If not, why?' was another question that caused the members to whisper merrily, nodding.

Rabeka heaved a sigh. 'My dream is to study and to complete a degree or a diploma in performing arts in the US or UK. I want to major in acting, singing and dancing. I

wannabee a complete performer.'

She paused and then smiled at the questioner. 'I've not yet realised the dream. Realising one's dream isn't an event; *Aowa!* It's a process. Delayed isn't denied. Despite life's hard-knocks I'm not beaten but wiser. Delayed means I'm being tested and I'll come out at the end of the tunnel better. At the moment I'm picking up energy and wisdom to fight the giants of the valley in front of me.

'Like a tree in winter, I'm resting, preparing for seasons of fruitfulness.

Remember that in the bible Joseph knew he would be Mr Somebody one day, but it took him fourteen years to realise his dream. So, I'm going out there and I'm going to woo my dream!'

The girls applauded; there was a knock at the door.

'Come in!'

No-one came in. A knock again. One of the girls hurried to the door where she spoke to someone outside.

'A guy would like to see you,' the girl told Rabeka.

As she walked to the door, her heart skidded with anxiety, wondering who the guy might be. She ran short of breath when she found TM waiting there, hands-in-his pockets, typically relaxed. They hurried towards each other, pecked each other's lips and hugged, with Rabeka leaning on his shoulder.

Excited, Rabeka grabbed TM by his hand and led him into the room. 'Guys, this is Bra T, my mentor and director and founder of the 'Realise Your Dream' project, that I've just told you about!'

The wide-eyed girls applauded thunderously. TM smiled and waved before he sat down. Rabeka gestured towards TM. 'No, please don't sit down! You must say a word to these girls! Just for five minutes Bra T!'

TM stood up, smiled and clasped his hands. 'Girls, you were all born with a purpose. When your parents said: "We have a baby girl!" your Creator had already deposited something in you that no other girl has. But you must know your purpose. How can you know your purpose? There are things you can do easily and you earnestly want to do. To achieve your purpose you must have a dream, to keep you focussed. There are a few things that you can do...that you must do to achieve your dream. See it, write it down and put it where you'll see it daily, speak to yourself about it, get clear objectives and pursue your dream, and never give up when it seems it's not going to happen sooner than you have thought.

'You must want to achieve your dream desperately! And don't focus on difficulties, for you'll catch a disease called difficultitis; too many excuses cause excusitis, and if you stay too long in status quo you'll be paralysed by status quo-titis!'

They applauded lustily, and some began to hiss to one another: 'status quo-titis.'

TM chuckled. 'Now stand up!'

They all stood up.

'I want you to say something after me!' TM told them. 'Say: "No dream is too high!"'

They said after him.

'No step too big!'

'No step too big!' shouted highly thrilled girls.

'And no vision too high for me to achieve!'

They repeated after him and applauded again as he grabbed Rabeka by her hand and led her towards the door, waving with the other hand, all smiles. The loud applause that included bashing the chairs and tables continued until TM and Rabeka went outside. Rabeka went to the group and asked them to choose a facilitator to replace her as she was going out with her mentor for about two hours. The facilitator would also tell Dudu, about Rabeka's apology.

'Let's go and chat in the car,' said smiling TM, who kept glancing at Rabeka from her head to her toes and back to her head.

TM squeezed her fingers and she chuckled. 'You look so different, so charming, so glamorous!' he said.

'Thanks bra T.'

They sat in his car and turned towards each other.

'Let's go and have a drink,' said TM as he inserted the key into the ignition and started the car.

At Rabeka's suggestion, TM drove to a quiet restaurant.

'So why are you here, bra T?' asked Rabeka.

'I've come to fetch you!'

'I'm not that easily fetchable!'

They laughed aloud.

'When I told your mother I was going to Pretoria, she said I must ask you when are you coming home.'

'I'll come during the pastor's wedding.'

TM nodded.

'I'm not yet ready to go to my village,' said Rabeka.

'When will you be ready?'

'When I making a better progress in achieving my dream.'

'Give me an example of better progress.'

'When I have been given a scholarship to study drama and dance in the US or UK.'

'Okay. What steps have you taken in achieving this goal?'

'I went to the local library and asked for some directories, and they've sent my request to their big library.'

'And how long will that take?'

'A week. And to nourish my CV I'll be attending evening drama lessons at Tshwane University of Technology.'

'I'm impressed with what I'm hearing.'

35 'I've come from the Department of Education, Head office in Schoeman Street,' said TM as they had their juices following plates of cheese-hamburgers and chips. 'I've exciting new for you!'

'Come with it bra T!'

'Guess what, I went to sign sponsorship forms. The Department is giving us funding of R1.5 million to produce "The Dream Girl"!'

Rabeka smacked her palms. 'Incredible!'

'I'll show you the forms! And you've been included in the budget as a director.' Rabeka stood up, smacked his palms with hers, hugged and kissed him on his cheeks before they sat down, her eyes bright with glee. She kept quiet, digesting the unexpected information.

'So do you accept the offer of directing "The Dream Girl"?''

'When is the project starting?'

'The processing of paper-work until we receive funding will take six weeks. If you're taking the job, you can start with rehearsals and script analysis and other directorial issues.'

'I'll have to think about it, bra T. This is just too good to be believed.'

TM kept quiet for a moment. 'How often are your evening drama lessons?' he asked.

'Once a week on Tuesdays from 16h00 to 19h00'

'We can fly you to Pretoria and back to Polokwane. You can wake up at home and sleep at home; you can catch the last plane to Polokwane at 21h00, and 30 minutes later I'll fetch you at the airport.'

Rabeka chuckled. 'You're making it impossible for me to say "no!"'

'You can't say "no!" Reebbs. We've started the project together. And you are the only one who must reap the benefits as a director.'

Again Rabeka kept quiet, the mill in her head still grinding what it had been given.

'I can't say "no" bra T. For all that you've done for me.'

He gave her a quick hug with his right arm.

Rabeka smiled. 'I still need some time, to get used to the idea.'

'Listen, why don't you take a break and join me in the village for two weeks and help me with papers to be submitted to the Department? You could return to Pretoria to serve a month's notice.'

'You must speak to my boss,' said Rabeka after a thoughtful pause.

'Who's your boss?' inquired TM.

'Sis Dudu. She started the project. And if I have to leave, I must first finish whatever is still in the pipe-line. I can't just...'

TM smiled, and squeezed her hand. 'It's okay Reebbs, I know you're going to handle this matter sensitively. You're a smart girl.'

Rabeka chuckled.

It crossed Rabeka's mind that the project could be the best way of doing good to Junior, as she had promised to make peace with him; she would invite him as a guest director to evaluate the play - and be paid for the assignment - just before 'The Dream Girl' hit the road.

Following a short pause TM winked at her. 'You're going to be so busy that you won't find any room for a Romeo.'

'The guy will have to overtake me and give me a million reasons why I must stop and listen to his nonsense!'
They laughed.

36 Thirty minutes after TM had left, Rabeka was busy with the group, listening as the facilitator - who had replaced her - wrapping up. A knock at the door distracted their attention; one of the girls went to the door and came back. 'There's a guy who wants to see you.'

Rabeka walked to the door with bated breath.

She found Mashudu waiting. She gasped and retreated. '*Hawu Shudus*, what puts you here? Are you looking for someone?'

He smiled, delaying an answer. She could not smile back; she had not yet recovered from the shock of seeing the guy she least expected. Besides, she had no idea of his agenda. She found that his soot-black dread-locks contrasted well with his white Chinese-collared silken shirt, which reminded her of the first time she laid her eyes on him. She was glad he had visited her when she looked and felt her best.

She felt an inch taller with confidence on top of cork-soled 'open-toes' shoes, gazing into Mashudu's brown pupils. She thought: *Can't you see I'm alone and happy?*

She observed his eyes inspecting her hair, and she knew he was stunned by a topmost piece of sculpture shaped like a coffee-mug with double holders; she had added chocolate brown highlights that matched with her make-up.

'I'm looking for you,' said Mashudu softly, his face telling her he had avoided a stammer or a blush. 'I brought a key-board; I want to play you a love-song.'

Their attention was distracted by the sound of two bangs of car-doors.

37 Rabeka saw Pontsho and Dudu walking towards them, carrying shopping bags.

Pontsho and Dudu radiated smiles which Rabeka thought were not genuine; she wondered if Pontso was jealous to see her with Mashudu whom he had never met. Rabeka also wondered if Dudu had brought Pontsho as a last-ditch attempt to foist a 'consolation prize' on her. Rabeka introduced Pontsho and Dudu to Mashudu; they all exchanged hand-shakes.

'I heard about you, Mashudu,' said Pontsho, 'the people at the drama used to think I was you.'

'Okay,' Mashudu sounded bored.

'Pontsho has been a good friend,' said Rabeka, 'he was always available when I needed help.'

'I see,' said Mashudu.

'He even attended my father's funeral, and when I had problems in Mafikeng he also came.'

Mashudu smiled. 'That's good of him.'

Rabeka gestured towards Dudu, 'Sis Dudu is my boss.'

Mashudu saluted Dudu. 'Thank you, captain!'

Dudu chuckled, and handed the shopping plastic bags to Pontsho, who carried them to the kitchen.

Rabeka and Dudu exchanged protracted glances.

Rabeka grabbed Dudu by her hand. 'Shudu, can you excuse us for a moment. The sergeant is consulting the captain.'

Mashudu chuckled. 'Okay!'

After speaking in hushed tones for a short while Dudu and Rabeka parted. Dudu and Mashudu bade each other goodbyes. Dudu stopped at the entrance of the hall and turned; Pontsho came and stood beside her, his eyes turning dewy; they looked at Rabeka and Mashudu walking hand-in-hand towards his car.

As the car drove away Dudu and Pontsho kept looking until it disappeared.

Pontsho turned to Dudu, a tear increasing in his eye. 'I wanted to propose marriage to Reeb, now...'

Dudu gave him a strong bear-hug and patted his shoulder.

38 A few minutes later his car was out of the township; when Mashudu saw a dirt road that did not know a car-tyre for months, he turned into it, slowed the car, and avoided running into a meerkat hole or hitting stones; the road meandered towards Ga-Rankuwa mountains.

When Mashudu saw a huge morula-tree he stopped the car. After they had stepped out of the car they inspected the place which was far from all living things except the birds, small reptiles and the insects.

'Let's go and sit under the tree,' he suggested and Rabeka had no objection.

Mashudu took a sleeping bag from the boot of the car, hung it on his left shoulder and grabbed Rabeka's hand with his right hand. As he spread it a bird-dropping fell on his index finger.

He showed the black and white dropping and smiled. 'I heard if a bird shits on you, it's a sign of good-luck.'

They laughed as they sat down. But Rabeka felt she was not yet in the mood for jokes. A thought crossed her mind: *Did you ever share this sleeping bag with Florah? You cheat!*

Mashudu sensed her anxiety. 'I felt bad...' he said softly, 'in fact I was jealous when you said Pontsho was a good friend, and he was always available when you needed help, and that when you...'

Rabeka smiled and pinched the back of Mashudu's hand. 'Okay, Shudu, point taken! How can you change what has already happened?'

'You are right, Reeb, I can't change the past.'

He touched one of her bangles. 'One thing I can do, and I must do, is to try and explain why things went wrong.'

He smoothed the back of her right hand. 'Reeb, I'm very-very-very-very sorry about what has happened. I know I've caused a lot of injury, pain, embarrassment and many negative things I can't explain. Will you please allow me to tell why things went wrong?'

'What would be the goal?'

Mashudu paused and smiled. 'You'll get the picture as I explain.'

Rabeka gazed into his eyes. 'But how did you feel when you ignored my phones or when you got my missed calls, and SMSs?'

'Please be patient, I'll cover that question. Let me just speak and you'll be the judge and the jury.'

She kept quiet.

'You can ask questions,' he told her, 'if you feel I've forgotten anything. Okay?'

'It's okay.'

'Soon after I fell in love with you, our relationship was dogged by church politics; it has been watched by some church leaders with skepticism. Do you remember when I told you the liberal lifestyle among especially the youth changed when the pastor's mother joined the church? You've already confronted me over Florah - she had just come back from Burundi - and I told you we needed to find time. A month before she left, our relationship had died and was buried.'

'When was that?'

'About nine months ago; before we broke the relationship she had told me that she could come home every three months; but later it was decided that the army should stay there continually for nine months because the war-lords had refused to sign a peace agreement.'

'How many years were you lovers?'

'We met about ten years ago, when I was fifteen; and Florah was nine. We grew up at the Evangelical church, the church founded by the pastor's father. Whenever I went to church with my aunt, Florah and mother used to join us, because we lived in the same street. Florah's mother has been my aunt's friend for many years. I used to hold Florah by her hand, walking with her in front of my aunt and Florah's mother. My aunt used to say, in the presence of everybody: 'Shudu, raise up your wife, yourself!'

'So Florah was your childhood sweetheart.'

'Yes.'

'What went wrong?'

'When you grow older, you want to be proud that you can do things for yourself. It was assumed by the family and the church that Florah and I would be husband and wife. She was faithful to the idea of a sort of an arranged marriage while I began to doubt.'

'What made you doubt?'

'Things like personality differences and even philosophy of life. I know it may not make sense to you but in short I just felt we weren't suited for each other. One day I decided we should solve the problem once and for all.'

'So you thought of separation?'

'Yes! So one day I said to her: "Florah, I don't think the idea of love and marriage will work; so let's just be brother and sister."'

'Did she agree easily?'

'No. It took her a month to accept. When it was confirmed that she would go to Burundi, I said to her: "I want you to go to Burundi as a free woman and I want to remain here at home as a free guy."'

'And she agreed?'

'Yes!'

'So the rumour that you and her are re-uniting; where does it come from?'

'On a Sunday in the middle of January - you had gone to Ga-Rankurwa - I met Florah at the church. She had arrived in the middle of the week after you had left. Everything was fine, she was warmly welcomed at the church, and I related to her as a brother. After church I gave her and her mother a lift; she was seated with me in the front passenger seat.

'As I drove, asking about her experiences in Burundi she suddenly interrupted me and said: "Shudu, I want to speak to you, come and pick me up at my home at 15h00." One of the things that used to cause quarrels between us was that she often made demands without using the word 'please.' She was that type of a woman that believes that a man must work for the woman who must remain at home with children.'

'So you picked her up.'

'Where did you go?'

'We went to a restaurant.'

That must be the place where Patience saw them, thought Rabeka.

'She spoke with tears that she had made a mistake by agreeing that we should end the relationship. I told her it was too late for tears and that we couldn't change the past. She then threatened to commit suicide, I said: "No, you must not consider that, and you aren't going to do it!" She later told her mother, and her mother discussed with my aunt, and my aunt confronted me saying girls like Florah are girls of good character who must be rewarded by young men in the church. I told my aunt that I did not agree with her and she went to tell the pastor's mother during the Thursday's Mothers Union meetings.

On a Friday that week the pastor's mother summoned me. "What's this I hear that you've jilted Florah?" Pastor's mother was on me. "And you chose a girl you don't even know where she comes from, whose level of faith and purity you can't be sure about. We don't even have a letter from her pastor."

'When I tried to respond she interrupted me: "Listen Shudu you can't behave like an unbeliever, changing girls like underpants." I kept quiet because I knew I was fighting a battle I would never win. The pastor's mother is really the power behind the throne. If you do a thing she doesn't like you are in trouble.'

'When did she join Pastor Titus' church?'

'Two years ago. When the pastor's father died she remained in that church as an elder and an additional pastor. But she left the church when one of the elders who was a widower, wanted to marry her. So she joined her son's church as an elder.'

'Okay Shudu, church politics aside, what happened?'

'So the next Sunday I didn't go to church. And during the new week many people started calling me, telling me I shouldn't stay away from church. Others told me I was wrong by discontinuing my relationship with Florah. There was just too much pressure; I went to attend a fast-growing church at the city centre; many young people called me, saying I should come back because the standard of worship was declining. I also decided to block my cell numbers and got a new cell-phone.'

'That's why I couldn't get through to you?'

'Yes. And when I called you with my new numbers you did not answer my calls- perhaps I called when you were busy with rehearsals or performances. And when my calls were diverted to your voice-mail, a voice told me your voice-mails were full.'

'There was something wrong with my cell-phone. But I've fixed it now.'

'Do you know that Florah sent me a hands-off-Shudu SMS and an angry cell-

phone call?’

‘Yes she told me,’ said Mashudu softly, ‘I understand the hurt and embarrassment it has caused you, Reeb. I’m very sorry that...’

Rabeka brushed his arm. ‘Okay Shudu, I’ve forgiven her and I’m healed.’

‘Thank you, Reeb.’

‘Why did you want to speak to me? Did you just...?’ asked Rabeka.

‘I want to ask that we continue where we’ve left off.’

‘Where is that?’

‘At the point where we left our love.’

‘Our love?’

‘Yes, Reeb! After I left the church and went to stay alone, I talked to myself and I came to realise that I still loved you. Maybe that was a good thing about that temporary separation. Even if I might have had a relationship with someone. If I came to my senses that your love was better than the love I thought was better, I think I should be given a chance. I have learnt from this mistake, Reeb.’

‘Really?’

‘I mean it!’ He brushed her arm. ‘I love you Reeb.’

His hand smoothed her arm at her elbow and then her bicep. ‘And I’ve realised I cannot live without you.’

39 Rabeka kept quiet, and began to play with her fingers, tapping them against other. She gazed into his brown eyes, and continued playing with her fingers. When she again gazed into his eyes he smiled.

She smiled but the smile faded away until there was no trace of it on her face. ‘I heard you Shudu. Please give me time to think this over. You’ve taken me by surprise. I must pray about it, and...’

‘Pray about it?’

‘Yes! I must pray and also seek advice from aunt Mpule.’

He paused, clasped his hands and looked at them. ‘Please Reeb, I can’t wait for another day.’

‘You won’t die!’

‘I’ll be love-sick!’

She opened her right palm and looked at it as if she were doing her own palm-reading. Her mind wandered and she thought of TM’s job offer, which she had accepted. She felt torn. How was she going to split herself into two, one part remaining with Mashudu while another part went to her home to help TM as a director of ‘The Dream Girl.’? Or would Mashudu move to be nearer to her? Would he agree to relocate to Polokwane for a woman to whom he had not yet committed himself totally? *This is an issue for which I must pray with fasting*, she concluded.

She lifted her face; seriousness faded and was replaced by a gentle smile. ‘Okay Shudu,’ she said tenderly, ‘I accept your explanation. I’ve forgiven you and we can resume our love.’

He raised his head smiling. ‘Thank you Reeb. I never thought this would be possible, after all the harm I’ve caused. And I’m...’

'Are you promising that this will never happen again?'

'I do! Honestly I do! I've learned from my pain and I'm really...'

'Now shut up and kiss me!'

She smiled pouting her lips; he moistened his lips and bent his neck; he could smell her peach-flavoured lipstick; soon she felt his lips pressing into hers. He held her ear-lobes between his index-fingers and middle fingers. African dry mouth-kisses turned into French-kisses; their tongues engaged in wrestling, tasting each other's flavours.

She moved her smooth fingers up and down his temples, and explored his forehead, nose and ears; she also tugged at his beard. Kisses multiplied with compound interest until Rabeka and Mashudu found themselves lying and rolling on the grass. When kisses ended and their tongues disengaged, they faced each other like exhausted lovers after a marathon mating session. He left her lying on the sleeping bag and walked to the car.

'So this is the guy who has overtaken me,' said Rabeka, 'and has given me a million reasons why I must stop and listen to his nonsense!'

'What are you saying?' said Mashudu opening the boot.

Rabeka giggled. 'I'm just mumbling to myself!'

Mashudu took a key-board out of the boot, returned to her and played:

When I think of you /Juss wanna fly like a dove; /My heart's target's is you: /my prize, my flower, my love!

She waved her left index finger. 'Now stop playing the keyboard!' she interrupted his decrescendo C Major chord, 'And turn my ribs into your key-board!'

He descended on her and tickled her; she burst into an uproarious laughter, and he kissed her while her lips were parted. As the moment became torrid, she recalled what he once told her: *...couples who kiss a lot tend to stay together.*

— FINIS —

Epilogue

Although the novel has come to an end, the protagonist's dream is still to be fulfilled. In her journey towards the Promised Land, she faced many giants of the valley that have made her wiser, and more determined. She is young, has energy and time, and she has learnt that her challenges and trials are a preparation for a better future. For this reason her story will continue in the next volume.